Africa
Travel & Life

Premier Issue

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+

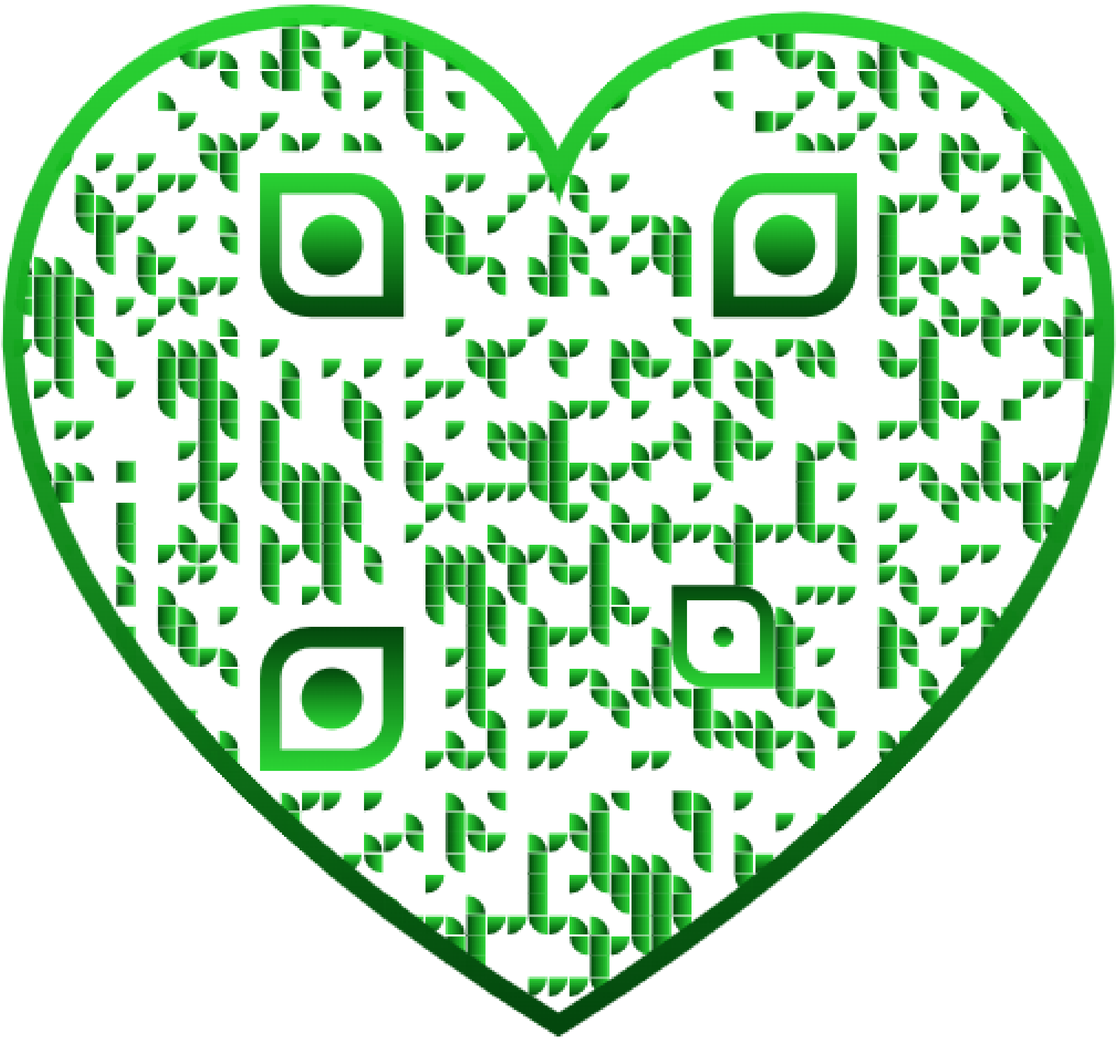
Fashion
On Location In
Freetown

In This Issue:

Iconic Places,
5 Capital Cities at the Highest Peak,
Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr,
Iconic Actors Desmond Elliot & Richard Mofe Damijo,
Diving the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade

Trending:

Tribal Masks,
Zeitz Gala 2025



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The Pure Joy That Is *Africa*

Traveling across Africa to interview remarkable individuals and capture the continent's breathtaking destinations was like a breath of fresh air.

Africa remains an untapped treasure trove—not in terms of history, as it is the birthplace of civilization, but in the countless stories still waiting to be told.

Dan Grinwiss's stunning imagery transported us to the world's oldest desert, the Namib, in Southern Africa, before we ventured to one of the continent's most historic and captivating cities, Algiers. In West Africa, I had an engaging conversation in Liberia with Nollywood icons Desmond Elliot and Richard Mofe-Damijo, who shared their perspectives on Africa's evolving travel scene.

Our fashion-on-location cover story took us to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where we shot three stunning models in designs by Sierra Leone's top designers. We also sat down with Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, a driving force behind Freetown's growing travel narrative.

Chrislyn Laurore's conversation with Kamau Sadiki is sure to touch the heart, as they quite literally dive into the depths of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

From there, we scaled the heights of East Africa—exploring Addis Ababa, Asmara, Nairobi, Kigali, and Antananarivo—before venturing into the paradise that is Seychelles.

A special shoutout to our brilliant creative director, Poornima Thanayamwatta, whose artistry brought these pages to life.
This premier issue is dedicated to my mother, Hesta Baker, and my amazing sons, Julian and Isaiah, whose encouragement keeps me going.

—Hesta

Photographed by Dan Grinwiss

Iconic Places

Breathtaking Namib Desert

Angola, Namibia, and South Africa

The world's oldest desert, this ancient and enigmatic expanse stretches over 2,000 kilometers along the Atlantic coastlines of Angola, Namibia, and South Africa. Within its shifting sands lie 'fairy rings,' mysterious circular formations that have baffled scientists and sparked myths of divine footprints or dancing fairies. Best seen from above, these circles form intricate patterns across the gravel plains and dunes, with diameters reaching up to 25 meters. Beyond the fairies, the Namib is home to the vast Namib-Naukluft National Park, Africa's largest game reserve, and famous sights like Sossusvlei, where vibrant orange dunes encircle white salt pans in an unforgettable landscape. This land of surreal beauty and hidden history was once a battleground during World War I, shaping the fate of German Southwest Africa. Today, the Namib's desolate charm draws visitors to witness its unrivaled landscapes and endemic wildlife, testament to its 55–80 million-year legacy as the world's oldest desert.

Stunning Clifton 4th Beach

Clifton 4th Beach, Cape Town, South Africa

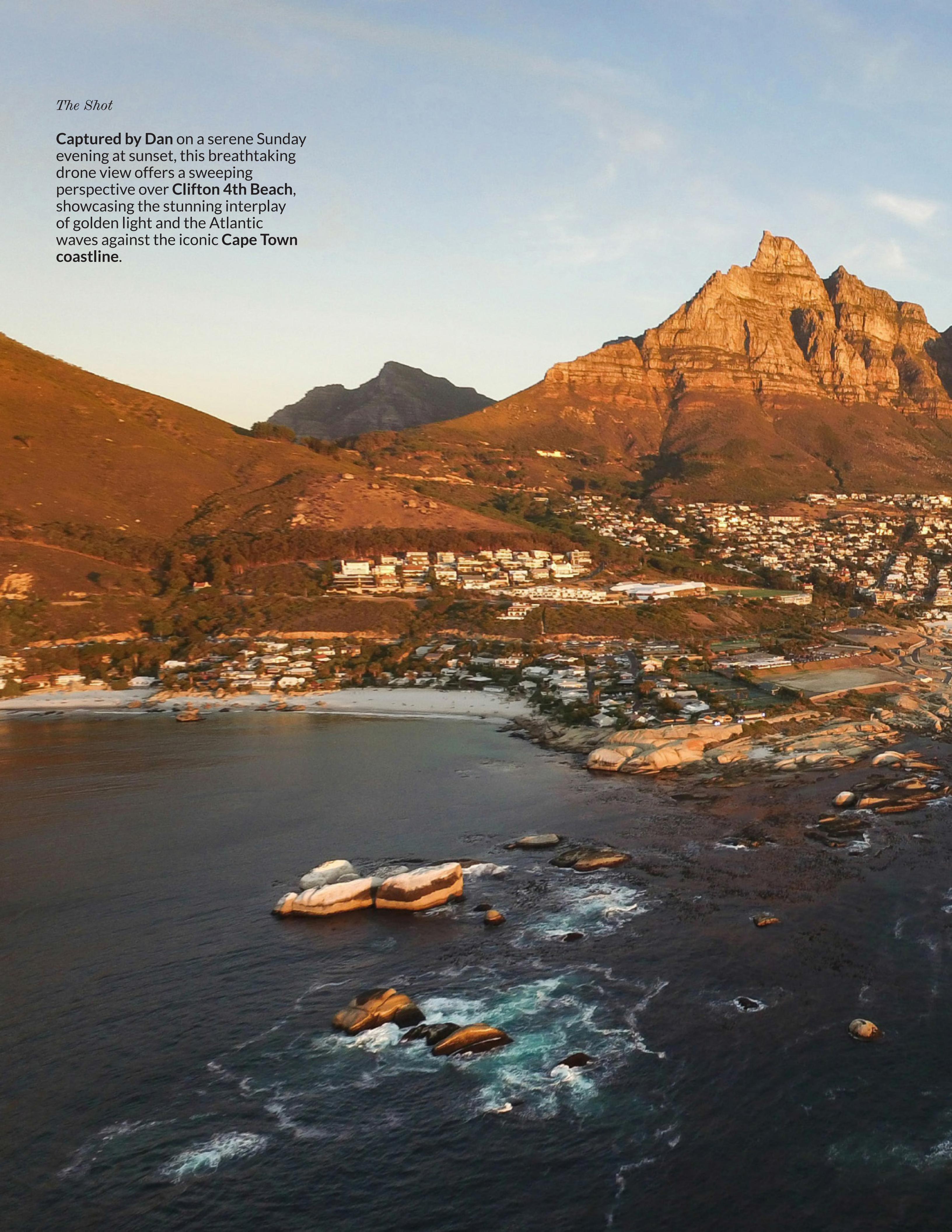
Clifton 4th Beach, Cape Town's coveted seaside gem, nestles gracefully against Lion's Head in a stunning interplay of natural beauty and architectural finesse. This Blue Flag beach is renowned for its powdery white sand and sheltered coves, forming part of the Atlantic's scenic edge near Camps Bay. Once home to the Khoisan people, whose unique click languages endure in parts of Southern Africa, Clifton's legacy has transformed from a quiet coastal retreat to an elite summer escape, a haven for yachts, and the setting of historical events like the 1794 São José Paquete Africa shipwreck. Once known as Clifton-on-Sea, this area has evolved while preserving its rich heritage, captivating visitors from around the world.

The Shot

Captured on an **adventure across Namibia's stunning landscape**, this photo reveals endless rolling dunes casting shifting shadows across the sand. Footprints, briefly marking a path, are soon swept away by the desert winds, leaving the land pristine and untouched. Photographer Dan Grinwiss reflects, **"the only trace of life is left in the wake of footprints briefly following your lead, before being swept away by the wind. What a beautiful place.'** Breathtaking indeed.

The Shot

Captured by Dan on a serene Sunday evening at sunset, this breathtaking drone view offers a sweeping perspective over **Clifton 4th Beach**, showcasing the stunning interplay of golden light and the Atlantic waves against the iconic **Cape Town coastline**.



Africa Explorer

Elevate your travel plans with Africa's most stunning high-altitude capitals, where natural beauty meets cultural intrigue. From the cool breezes of Addis Ababa's Entoto Hills to the timeless Art Deco streets of Asmara, each city invites you to discover its unique charm. Whether you're gazing over Kigali's thousand hills or trekking Nairobi's Ngong Hills, adventure and inspiration await at every turn.

Asmara, Eritrea

5

Most Mountainous Capital Cities

Asmara, Eritrea

A UNESCO World Heritage Site at 7,628 feet, *A City Frozen in Time* captivates with its preserved Art Deco architecture. Iconic landmarks like Cinema Impero and the Fiat Tagliero Building transport visitors to the Italian colonial era, while the city's serene cafés serve up unforgettable traditional coffee.

Nairobi, Kenya

The Green City in the Sun combines urban sophistication with wild wonders. At 5,889 feet, spot lions against skyscraper backdrops in Nairobi National Park, hike the panoramic Ngong Hills, or delve into colonial history at the Karen Blixen Museum.

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Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Known as *The Roof of Africa*, Addis Ababa sits at 7,726 feet, offering sweeping vistas and year-round cool weather. Wander through eucalyptus-lined streets, explore the Entoto Hills, visit the National Museum to meet "Lucy," and experience the vibrant chaos of Merkato Market.

Kigali, Rwanda

Perched at 5,141 feet, *The Land of a Thousand Hills* enchants with its rolling landscapes and eco-tourism appeal. From the reflective Kigali Genocide Memorial to nearby Mount Karisimbi treks, Kigali offers serene escapes and cultural immersion.

Antananarivo, Madagascar

Set at 4,199 feet, *The Heart of the Highlands* sprawls across 12 historic hills. Explore the royal Rova palace, marvel at Madagascar's unique wildlife in Tsimbazaza Zoo, and shop for vibrant crafts at Analakely Market, surrounded by stunning views of rice paddies and colorful homes.

Pack your bags for an altitude adjustment—Africa's mountainous capitals promise memories that soar as high as their peaks.

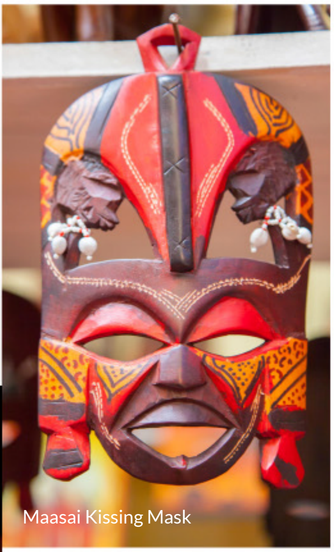
This aerial view captures the stunning landscape of **Agua Ize in Sao Tome e Principe, Africa**

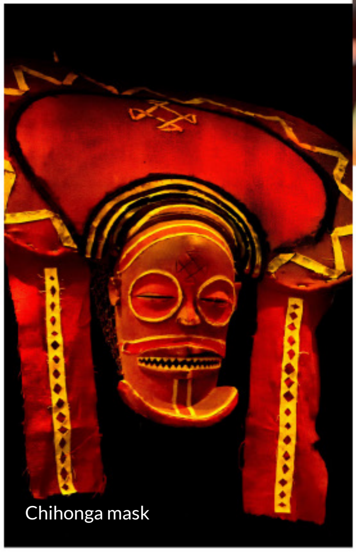
Africa Explorer

Must See Escape

Nestled in the heart of the Atlantic, São Tomé and Príncipe is Africa's best-kept secret, a destination where natural beauty and rich culture create an irresistible allure. Picture pristine white-sand beaches backed by verdant hills, and the breathtaking aerial vistas of Príncipe Island's UNESCO Biosphere Reserve—a haven for nature lovers and adventurers alike. Colonial-era architecture stands as a testament to the islands' storied past, while lively carnivals celebrate vibrant local traditions. Add the warmth of its welcoming people, and you'll find a destination that feels both timeless and refreshingly undiscovered. São Tomé and Príncipe is your next must-see escape.

Yoruba Mask


Maasai Kissing Mask


Chihonga mask

Africa's Timeless Artistry in Masks

Faces of Tradition

Africa, a mosaic of 54 nations and boundless traditions, captures its soul through the striking artistry of masks.

These pieces aren't just art—they're portals to the past, embodying ancestors, spirits, and centuries-old rituals. From the bold geometric designs of West African tribes to the intricate carvings of Central Africa, each mask offers a glimpse into a unique cultural narrative. Beyond masks, Africa's heritage shines through body painting, dance, and an unparalleled sense of storytelling.

Chewa "Simoni" Mask

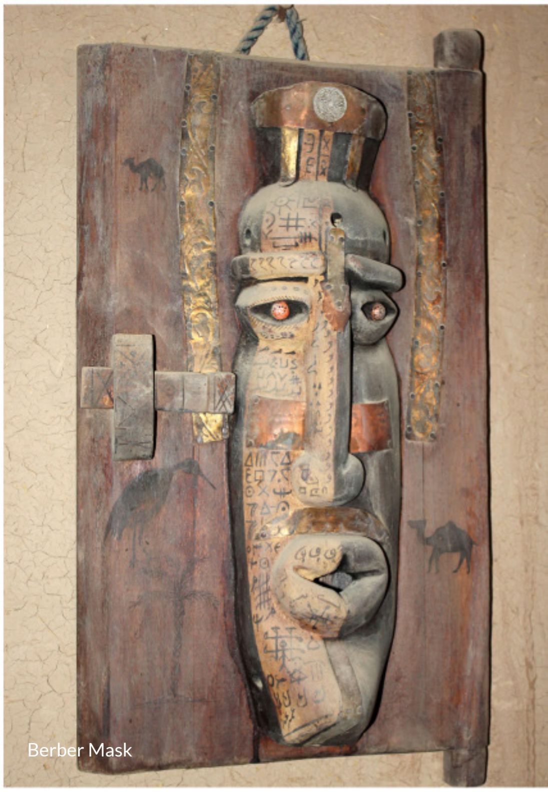
This late 20th-century Chewa "Simoni" or "Mbalangwe" mask from Malawi, crafted from wood, paint, feathers, and fur, represents ancestral spirits. Worn during the Nyau masquerade, it plays a crucial role in Chewa initiation rituals.

Berber Wooden Mask

Berber wooden masks, originating from the Northern Africa countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, are deeply rooted in the region's ancient traditions. These masks were used in ritual ceremonies to protect against evil spirits and are valued for their symbolic artistry and craftsmanship.

Maasai Kissing Mask

This large Maasai Kissing Mask from Kenya, Eastern Africa, crafted from wood and adorned with intricate designs, was traditionally used in Maasai ceremonies to symbolize unity and the importance of community. It is a powerful cultural artifact, representing heritage and ritual.

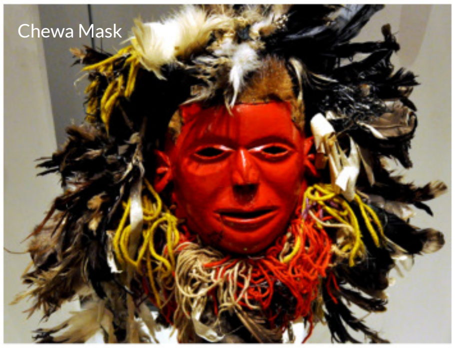

Berber Mask

Yoruba Mask

This commemorative head from the ancient Yoruba city of Ife, Nigeria in Western Africa, dating back to the 12th-14th century, exemplifies the refined artistry and royal heritage of the Yoruba people, symbolizing power, wisdom, and ancestral reverence.

Cihongo Mask

The Cihongo mask of the Chokwe people of Angola in Central Africa, crafted in the mid-20th century, symbolizes power, wealth, and authority. It is used in ceremonies celebrating leadership, prosperity, and ancestral connections in Angola's vibrant cultural traditions.


Chewa Mask

Africa Explorer

Mindelo Carnival 2025 is Africa's Festival of Vibrance

Vicente, Mindelo Carnival takes place annually on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, also known as Shrove or Fat Tuesday. The sun-drenched island in Cape Verde is home to the Mindelo Carnival 2025, an event that dazzled with its kaleidoscope of color, music, and unrestrained joy. Held on March 4th, this iconic celebration is a vibrant fusion of African, Portuguese, and Brazilian influences, earning its place as one of Africa's most captivating cultural showcases. The legendary Cesária Évora once said, "Mindelo is a Brazilim" (Mindelo is like a tiny Brazil), perfectly capturing the lively and infectious spirit of the festival.

At the heart of the Carnival was the grand parades, where samba schools mesmerized spectators with choreographed performances in glittering,

FOR MORE INFORMATION

visit:
www.mindelocaboverde.com

feathered costumes, narrating the rich stories of Cape Verdean heritage. Avenida Marginal became a pulsating stage of rhythm and creativity, framed by Mindelo's picturesque waterfront. The festivities didn't stop there. Electrifying street parties and the rhythmic beats of morna and funaná filled the air, while the "Battle of Samba Schools" showcased months of artistry and dedication. For families, the Children's Parade provided a heartwarming spectacle, with young dancers proudly celebrating their heritage. As night descended, the streets came alive with illuminated floats and shimmering costumes, transforming the island into a radiant wonderland. Mindelo Carnival 2025 was more than a festival—it was an artistic, cultural, and sensory journey that left visitors enchanted.

A Night of Art and Elegance at Zeitz MOCAA *Gala*

2025

Zeitz MOCAA's Annual Gala on **21 February 2025** in Cape Town was a night of art, glamour, and celebration. The evening featured a red-carpet arrival, a private champagne reception, and an exquisite Ocular Lounge dinner. The highlight? The Zeitz MOCAA Honorary Award, honoring visionary artist **Otobong Nkanga**.

Fresh off her historic Venice Biennale 2026 curator announcement, **@madamekoyo** paid tribute to Nkanga's artistic impact. **@thandiswamazwai**'s electrifying performance set the stage for a Don Julio after-party, where **@lelowhatsgood**'s gqom set kept everyone dancing.
Congrats to the Zeitz team!

#ZeitzMOCAAGala #AfricanArt
#ContemporaryArt

Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa

Actress and model Joann Strauss

Simphiwe Dana

Otobong Nkanga

Photographed by **Chrislyn Laurie Laurore**

Interview and Written by **Hesta Baker**

A Conversation with *Mayor* Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr

Perched atop the rooftop garden of Freetown's City Hall, with the Atlantic Ocean shimmering in the distance and lush green hills framing the city, I had the privilege of sitting down with Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr. Known for her #TransformFreetown initiative as Freetown's first elected female mayor in 40 years, she embodies a dynamic blend of passion, innovation, and a deep-rooted love for her city.

Mayor Aki-Sawyerr's journey—from her upbringing in Freetown to her influential leadership—mirrors the vibrant soul of the city itself. Steeped in history, culture, and opportunity, Freetown is a place she is inviting the world to explore.

Born at Cottage Hospital, Freetown's primary maternity hospital, the Mayor's early years were shaped by the city's natural beauty, historical landmarks, and cultural richness. Growing up near Fourah Bay College—Africa's oldest Western-style university—she recalls her outdoor childhood adventures, from climbing trees to fishing in streams and swimming at Lumley Beach. "These experiences sparked my love for nature," she shares.

MORE ON PAGE 22 ▶

Freetown's vibrant **Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr** radiates elegance in a traditional Krio cabaslot, standing atop City Hall with the Atlantic Ocean and cityscape forming a breathtaking backdrop.

Standing tall on Aberdeen Hill, the **Cape Sierra Lighthouse** has guided ships into Freetown's harbor since **1812**. Though no longer active, this historic beacon remains a symbol of the city's maritime legacy. Perched in an awe-inspiring location along the Atlantic Ocean, it overlooks a breathtaking expanse of boulders where visitors can stroll and take in the coastal beauty. As **Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyer**r affirms, 'We don't have mining or agriculture, but we have history, culture, and heritage. That's what we're marketing to the world to create jobs for our youth.'

#DiscoverFreetown
#HeritageTourism
#CapeSierraLighthouse

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19 ▶

Freetown's breathtaking landscape, with its rolling hills and pristine beaches, offers a tapestry of adventure and serenity. "The beach was on our doorstep," she fondly remembers. "We'd come home from school and nag our dad to take us down to the water. That's the beauty of living here."

Her academic and professional journey took her to the prestigious London School of Economics, where she earned a master's degree in international relations, and later trained as a chartered accountant. While building a successful career in risk consulting and project management in the UK, her connection to Freetown remained steadfast.

During Sierra Leone's civil war, she co-founded the Sierra Leone War Trust (SLWT), a nonprofit supporting children's education and welfare. "Even when I lived abroad, I felt connected to Sierra Leone," she reflects. "I'm proud that SLWT has helped young women become doctors, accountants, and more."

In 2014, the Ebola outbreak marked a turning point. Witnessing the crisis firsthand, she returned to Sierra Leone to volunteer in the national response. This experience inspired her to enter politics. "I realized how much change was needed at the local government level," she explains. "Nine months before the election, I made the leap to run for mayor. It was a crazy decision, but I'm grateful I took it."

During her first term, Mayor Aki-Sawyerr launched the #TransformFreetown agenda, prioritizing sustainable development, job creation, and climate resilience. Notable initiatives include the Freetown the Treetown project, which aimed to plant one million trees but has already grown over 1.2 million. "Now we don't just plant the trees—we grow them. That means employing young people as growers, monitors, and trackers. It has created thousands of jobs," she proudly states.

Sanitation is another cornerstone of her administration, with projects such as Freetown's first wastewater treatment plant and waste-to-energy solutions. "We're turning waste into briquettes as an alternative to charcoal, reducing the demand for trees as cooking fuel," she explains.

For the Mayor, sustainable development also means creating opportunities for Freetown's youth, who make up 70% of the population. "We don't have mining or agriculture, but we have history, culture, and heritage. That's what we're marketing to the world to create jobs for our youth," she explains.

Freetown's Historical Significance

Freetown's name is a powerful reminder of its history as the first place in Africa where freed slaves returned. The story begins in 1787 with the arrival of the "Black Poor" from the UK, led by Granville Sharp. The defining moment came on March 11, 1792—now celebrated as Freetown Day—when 15 ships from Nova Scotia brought over 1,100 settlers seeking freedom. "That's the date we recognize," she says. "It's when Freetown truly came to life." Today, Freetown Day is an annual celebration of the city's heritage, diversity, and resilience. Festivities include vibrant parades, cultural showcases featuring ethnic groups like the Mende, Soso, Mandingo, Karankor, and Krio, and traditional attire such as the Krio cabaslot. Mayor Aki-Sawyerr warmly invites travelers to experience Freetown Day 2025 this March. "If you want to experience Freetown on the streets, come on the 11th of March," she urges.

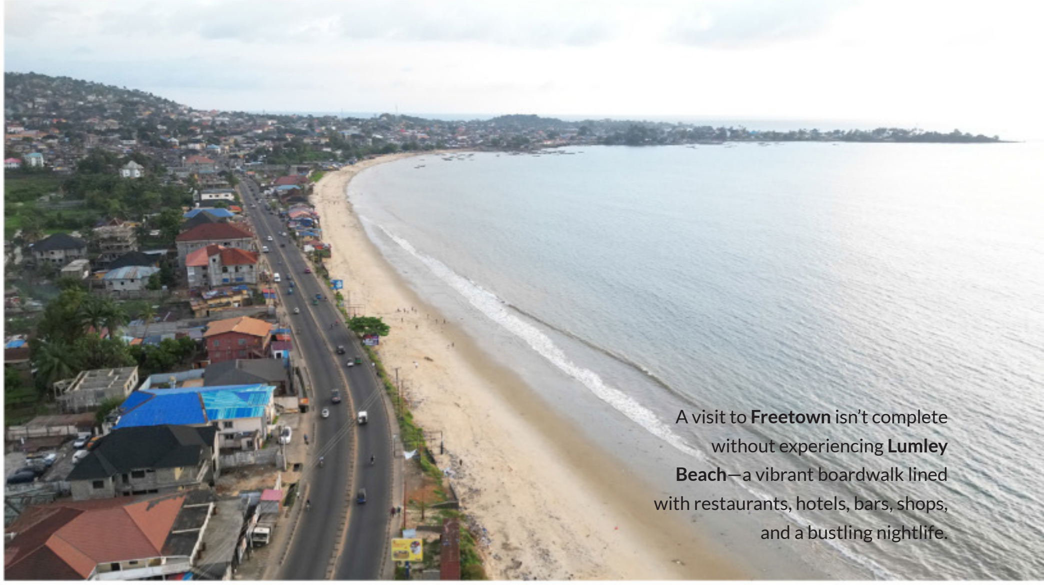
An Emerging Destination

With its rich heritage, stunning landscapes, and vibrant culture, Freetown is poised to become a premier travel destination. Mayor Aki-Sawyerr is also focusing on regional tourism, encouraging visitors from neighboring West African countries. "It's so easy to get here," she says. "We want people from Monrovia, Conakry, and beyond to visit. Whether it's for a weekend getaway or a longer stay, Freetown offers a chance to unwind, explore, and connect."

Freetown's cultural calendar is packed with events, from EcoFest—a celebration of music, fashion, and sustainability—to book festivals and art showcases. The city is also gaining recognition as a hub for fashion, with designers like Swank Couture's Jenneh Amara Bangali, Marie Caroll, and other amazing designers making waves.

Mayor Aki-Sawyerr's unwavering love for Freetown shines through in her efforts to elevate the city. "Freetown is my home and my heart," she says. "It's a place of beauty, history, and opportunity. I invite the world to come and see for themselves. Come and enjoy the beauty that is God's gift to us and that we'd like to share with you."

Whether you're drawn by its beaches, culture, or indomitable spirit, Freetown is ready to welcome you. Come for the charm, stay for the experience, and leave with memories to last a lifetime.



A visit to **Freetown** isn't complete without experiencing **Lumley Beach**—a vibrant boardwalk lined with restaurants, hotels, bars, shops, and a bustling nightlife.

A drive along Freetown's hillside is an experience in itself, with cascading hills adorned with beautiful homes showcasing architectural styles ranging from 19th-century classics to modern designs.

Lounging amidst boulders on Mahe’s serene beach with beautiful view of catamaran

A *Moment* in Paradise

By Louise Woods

The moment our catamaran glided into the turquoise waters of the Seychelles, I knew I was in for an unforgettable adventure. The air carried a crisp saltiness, and sunlight danced on the waves, promising days of unparalleled beauty. It was my birthday week, and flying solo on this journey felt like the perfect way to celebrate.

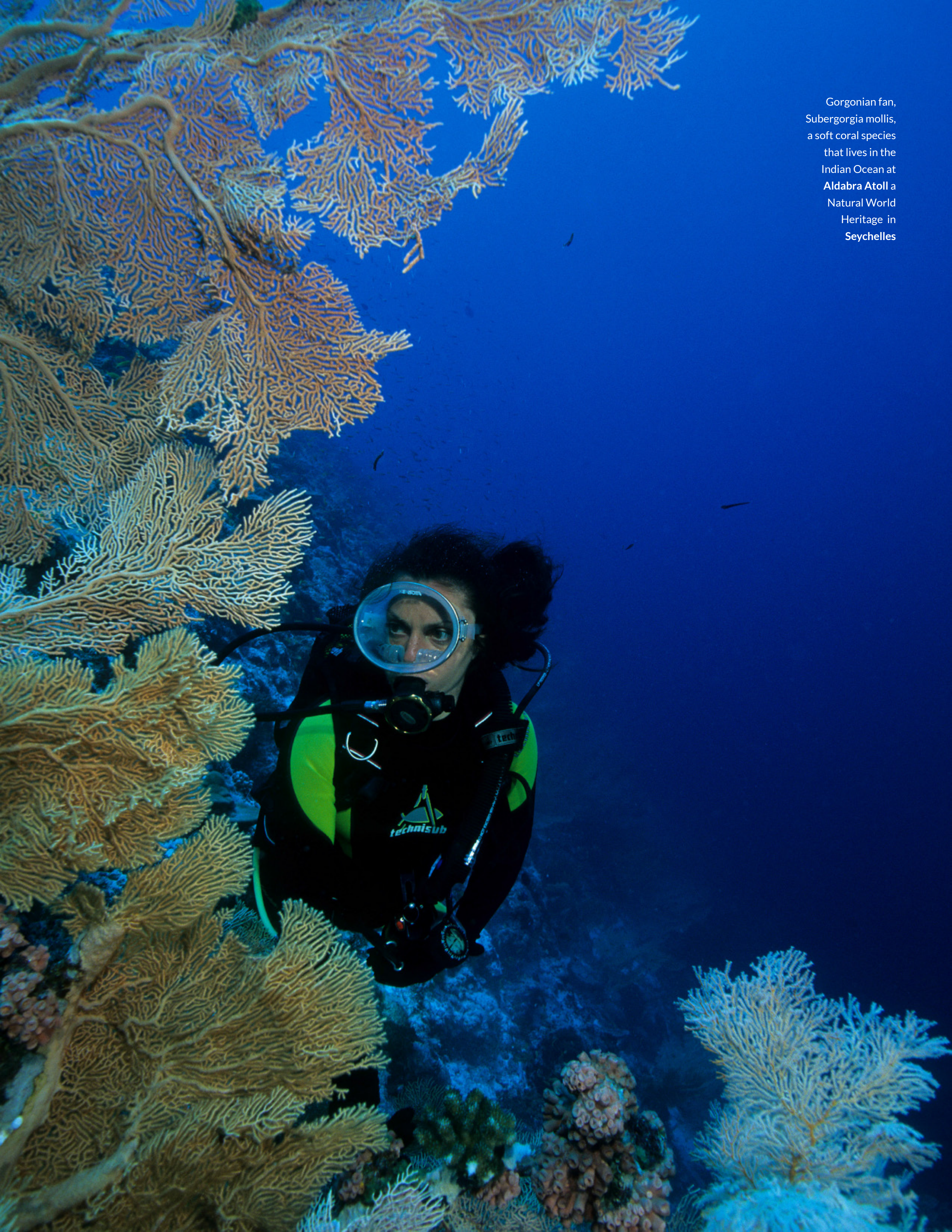
The adventure began with a scenic flight over the vast Sahara and into the Indian Ocean. From above, the Seychelles archipelago looked like scattered emeralds framed by golden beaches and azure seas. As the plane descended, palm trees swayed gently in the breeze, their shadows spilling onto pristine sands.

I stayed in a luxurious beach villa on Mahé, where the ocean's whispers lulled me to sleep each night. The villa, with its open-air design and art-deco flair, blended seamlessly into the landscape. Mornings began with barefoot strolls along the shore, a time to meet fellow travelers or exchange smiles with locals eager to share their favorite island treasures. I spent hours lounging in a hammock tied between two palms, letting the rhythm of the waves soothe my soul.

Aldabra giant tortoises at **Victoria Botanical gardens** on **Mahe Island, Seychelles**

One of those treasures was a secluded beach tucked between colossal boulders. The contrast of smooth granite and white sand was striking. The towering boulders added an element of drama to the serene setting, creating the perfect spot to simply exist in the moment.

Another highlight was a guided diving excursion. Beneath the waves, I entered a vibrant underwater world of coral reefs teeming with kaleidoscopic fish and graceful sea turtles. Each dive unveiled new wonders, leaving me in awe of the untouched beauty below the surface. A visit to the Seychelles National Botanical Gardens in Victoria added another layer of magic. This lush sanctuary was alive with the colors and scents of exotic plants and towering palms. Watching Aldabra giant tortoises move with slow, deliberate grace felt like a glimpse into another time. Wandering the immaculate gardens, surrounded by birdsong and the hum of bees, I felt an overwhelming connection to nature.



Gorgonian fan, Subergorgia mollis, a soft coral species that lives in the Indian Ocean at **Aldabra Atoll** a Natural World Heritage in **Seychelles**

Relaxing in a
hammock
Mahe, Seychelles

Seychelles is more than just a destination, it's a paradise that lingers in your soul.

Evenings in Seychelles were equally enchanting. One night, I dined at a private beach villa with Italian chefs I'd befriended earlier that day. They were scouting the islands for a new restaurant location and decided to celebrate my birthday with a feast. Beneath a canopy of stars, we laughed, shared stories, and indulged in the most exquisite pasta paired with fine wine. My explorations continued into the mountains, where Seychellois homes perched on cliffs offered breathtaking views of the ocean and lush valleys. The mountain air was cool and invigorating, a refreshing contrast to the tropical heat. Yet, my favorite moments were spent back on the beach, swaying gently in my hammock and absorbing the beauty of the mountains as a backdrop to the shimmering sea.

On my final evening, my Italian friends treated me to a farewell dinner on Eden Island, a luxurious marina community. The menu was a tribute to the ocean: freshly caught seafood spiced delicately and paired with local fruits. The sound of waves lapping against the shore provided a soothing rhythm as we savored each bite. Seychelles is more than just a destination—it's a paradise that lingers in your soul. From its vibrant marine life to serene botanical gardens, dramatic granite-strewn beaches to intimate gatherings under starlit skies, this island paradise surpassed every expectation. Leaving was bittersweet, but the Seychelles had left an indelible mark on my heart—a place I'll always long to return to.

Iconic Actors *Desmond Elliot* and *Richard Mofe-Damijo (RMD)* on Africa Travel

A Candid Conversation at Monrovia's Kendeja Beach Resort with AT&L Publisher Hesta Baker

At the *RLJ Kendeja Resort* in Monrovia, Liberia, with the rhythmic sounds of the Atlantic Ocean in the background, two of Africa's cinematic icons, Richard Mofe-Damijo (RMD) and Desmond Elliot, shared an intimate conversation with Africa Travel and Life Magazine. These titans of Nollywood sat down to discuss travel on the African continent, their experiences, and their thoughts on the future of tourism in Africa. Their insights provide a unique perspective on African travel from a local lens, and offer advice for travelers keen on exploring the hidden gems across the continent.

The interview began with both stars reflecting on their journeys to becoming two of Nollywood's powerhouses.

RMD, who hails from Warri, Delta State, recounted his early days. "I always knew I wanted to be seen. I didn't know how, but I was determined to find a path that would lead me to television and film." He studied theater at the University of Benin and got his big break at 18 years old. Influenced by Western films and inspired by Nigerian legends like Jimmy Sholanke and Olu Jacobs, he pursued acting relentlessly. Over time, RMD built a career that saw him not only work with the same icons he once admired but also become one himself.

Desmond Elliot's journey took a different route. Born in Jos, he admitted that he never considered acting initially. "I was influenced by Indian and Chinese movies—actors like Jackie Chan, but I never thought I'd become one myself," he said with a chuckle. He started acting in church drama groups, and the more people asked if he'd go into acting, the more he began to consider it. After moving to Lagos, his career took off, and he's never looked back since.

ATTENTION
NO DIVING

When asked about their earliest travel memories, actor Desmond Elliot recalled the **Mambilla Plateau**, stating "It was beautiful. There was a game reserve, and it was a lovely place to visit as a child." The breathtaking Mambilla Plateau is **Nigeria's hidden paradise** of rolling green hills, misty valleys, and endless tea plantations.

At 1,600 meters above sea level, **Mambilla Plateau** is Nigeria's highest and most breathtaking landscape. From rolling hills and deep gorges to cascading waterfalls and the **Gashaka Gumti National Park**, it's an adventurer's dream. As Desmond Elliot recalls, "It was beautiful. There was a game reserve, and it was a lovely place to visit as a child." Discover serenity, wildlife, and culture in this untouched gem.

#ExploreNigeria
#MambillaPlateau

Defining "Success" in the Industry

The conversation quickly turned to the question of when they knew they had 'made it.' For Elliot, the realization came on my way to catch a flight to Brazil. "On my way to the airport, I could count 14 movies billboards that I was on, about to be released, and my face was on every single one. It hit me then, and I asked God, 'What's next?'"

RMD, however, offered a more philosophical view: "I don't think I've made it yet. I'm recognized, sure, but I want more. The lifetime achievement awards are nice, but that doesn't mean it's time to retire. I'm more energized now than ever." His commitment to continuing his career, despite accolades, is a testament to his passion for his craft.

Challenges in the African Movie Industry

Both actors emphasized the challenges that come with working in the film industry, but neither sees them as reasons to stop. Elliot remarked, "Every day is a challenge, but God gives us the strength to continue. I'm happiest when I'm around filmmakers—it's what fulfills my heart's desire." RMD echoed similar sentiments: "Challenges will always be there. But that's life. You can't expect success without hard work."

Changing Perceptions of Africa Through Travel

Our conversation shifted toward travel on the continent, a subject that revealed their deep pride in Africa's beauty and potential.

"When non-Africans think of travel in Africa, they think of safaris," RMD noted. "But it's so much more than that. Africa has everything the world has to offer, but the marketing hasn't been successful. And then there are the travel advisories, which are done deliberately to discourage travel to Africa."
Elliot added, "The perception of Africa has definitely changed, thanks to technology and the media showing more of our cities and culture. We're no longer just 'the jungle.' When I think of African travel, I think of Mauritius, East Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa's rich history. We need to showcase that."
Both actors stressed that Africa's image needs a complete overhaul. From their perspective, travel should not just be about safaris but about history, culture, and the vibrancy of the continent's cities.

Earliest Travel Memories: The Beauty of Nigeria

When asked about their earliest travel memories, Elliot recalled the Mambilla Plateau, a serene and breathtaking destination in Nigeria. "It was beautiful. There was a game reserve, and it was a lovely place to visit as a child."
For RMD, it was his time at the Bauchi Game Reserve during his youth service days. "We used to visit the Yankari Game Reserve, stay in chalets, and interact with the baboons. There were warm springs where we could drink the water—it was such a special time."

RMD says the Bauchi Game Reserve during his youth service days was his earliest memory of travel.. "We used to visit the Yankari Game Reserve, stay in chalets, and interact with the baboons. There were warm springs where we could drink the water." Originally designated as a game reserve in 1956, Yankari became Nigeria's largest national park in 1991.

Telling Africa's Story to the World

One of the most significant obstacles facing African tourism, according to both actors, is the international narrative. RMD spoke about his experience in Liberia, expressing how safe and welcoming he found the country. "I'm in Liberia now, and I haven't seen one police car. There's no fear. It's peaceful. But the world doesn't hear about these things."

Elliot added, "Tourism isn't just about animal reserves. It's about monuments, carnivals, and our rich history. For example, we have the Calabar Carnival in Cross River and Lagos is planning one too. There's so much culture here."

RMD pointed out that internal tourism is thriving, particularly in Lagos. "We have a problem when embassies designate our countries as unsafe through travel advisories. But we know better. There's so much beauty in our countries, and it's time the world saw that."

The Future of Africa Travel

Both RMD and Desmond Elliot left us with a hopeful outlook for the future of African tourism. Elliot emphasized the need for government support but clarified, "Government has no business in the everyday running of tourism. Just create the right environment, and we'll handle the rest."

RMD agreed, pointing out that Africa is filled with innovative people who just need "that little push" to elevate African tourism to its deserved place on the global stage. From exotic destinations like Mauritius and Zanzibar to the cultural heart of Lagos, these Nollywood icons are proof that Africa's beauty, culture, and adventure are ready to be experienced by the world.

In their words, Africa is not just a destination—it's an experience waiting to be discovered.

Rapid Fire

Elliot:

What Is Your Favorite African Destination For…
- Romance: Zanzibar
- Shopping: South Africa
- Cultural: Nigeria
- Adventure: Nigeria

RMD:

What Is Your Favorite African Destination For…
- Romance: Botswana
- Shopping: Lagos
- Cultural: Lagos
- Adventure: Kenya

Meet Chef Dieuville Malonga

He Is Shattering the Culinary Glass Ceiling and Has Created A Culinary Masterpiece in Rwanda

Written by Adina Tadessse

Celebrated across the culinary world, Chef Dieuveil Malonga has made an indelible mark on African gastronomy. Ranked 6th in Forbes' "30 Under 30" in 2018 and a finalist for the Basque Culinary World Prize, Malonga has dedicated his career to showcasing African ingredients and heritage. His restaurant, Meza Malonga in Kigali, Rwanda, was listed among The World's 50 Best Restaurants, and in 2021, he was honored as one of the "50 Next" for empowering future chefs. His contributions to the culinary landscape earned him the title of "Champion of Change" in 2022 for mentoring young African culinary talents.

Originally from Congo-Brazzaville, Malonga's journey spans across Europe and Africa. Raised in Germany, with formative years spent in France, he explored 48 African countries before launching Meza Malonga. Today, his Kigali-based restaurant offers a unique, three-hour tasting experience that draws from his vast cross-continental explorations and his deep-rooted cultural pride.

After travelling 48 African countries and creating a world-class Pan-African dining experience, Dieuville Malonga is taking fine dining to new heights, creating a culinary destination unlike any other. Africa Travel and Life caught up with him to learn more about this extraordinary young Congolese Chef who is shattering all of the glass ceilings in Rwanda.

Musanze is home to **Malonga's 500 spices seven-hectare farm** and is **Rwanda's most mountainous district,** containing the largest part of the Volcanoes National Park. Five of the eight volcanoes of the Virunga chain are within the district boundaries, with most of Rwanda's mountain gorillas found here, making it the **most popular tourist destination** in the country.

The Essence of Meza Malonga

Malonga's vision for Meza Malonga is driven by a desire to blend tradition with innovation, fostering a deeper connection to African roots through cuisine. His restaurant sources ingredients from his seven-hectare farm, stocked with over 500 spices and ingredients gathered from across Africa and beyond. "I bring seeds from everywhere I travel, including Jamaica, Brazil, and other countries with rich culinary traditions," Malonga explains. "My restaurant is a school, a laboratory for young chefs to innovate with African ingredients and techniques."

At Meza Malonga, there is no fixed menu. Instead, diners embark on a 12- to 14-course journey with dishes inspired by a different African country each day. Malonga believes in education through food, likening the experience to a curated museum exhibit. "We invite guests to touch, smell, and engage with spices, creating an immersive sensory experience," he says. Each course is crafted to surprise, teaching diners about unfamiliar African ingredients and ways they can be used.

Inspired by Heritage

Malonga's journey into food was influenced by his grandmother, who owned a restaurant. "I think I always knew I would cook," he reflects. "When I moved to Germany, I studied culinary science and gained hands-on experience in college." His roots in the village and memories of cooking with his grandmother shape his commitment to connecting culture and cuisine. "In the village, everything was intertwined—culture, food, the land. Africa is diverse, and I want to understand and celebrate what people eat in every region."

His passion for exploration led him to collect spices and flavors from various countries. "When I travel, I bring back spices that inspire my dishes," he shares. Malonga's approach is health-focused and sustainable; as an athlete, he prioritizes organic and locally sourced ingredients. This philosophy has inspired his plans for a new farm-based restaurant, where guests can experience rural Rwanda and enjoy a village-inspired ambiance.

An Exciting New Chapter

In March 2025, Malonga will expand his vision with a new culinary campus near Lake Ruhondo in Musanze, Rwanda. Overlooking Volcanoes National Park, the Meza Malonga Campus will be more than a restaurant; it will be an ecosystem dedicated to food innovation. The campus includes an experimental farm, culinary training center, African spice and fermentation lab, and an indoor/outdoor dining area with panoramic views. "We're creating a place that celebrates Africa's culinary heritage by fusing traditional flavors with contemporary techniques," he says.

The campus will provide an immersive farm-to-table experience, connecting aspiring chefs from across Africa. The goal is to establish a global movement for African culinary excellence, where chefs can share techniques, recipes, and cultural knowledge from their diverse backgrounds. "I want to inspire African chefs to elevate our culinary heritage on a global stage," Malonga states passionately.

Chef Dieuville Malonga at work on his farm.

Musanze Ecosystem menu

Gufungura Season is upon us and a time to discover ***Afro-fusion Cuisine*** with Meza Malonga's 10 Course Menu in April.

The Meza Malonga Experience

The new Meza Malonga Experience will be a full-day journey through Africa's flavors. Guests start with a boat tour on a traditional fishing vessel to learn about the region's ecosystem. Upon arrival at the campus, they are greeted with a welcome drink, followed by a tour that engages all senses. The dining experience features an 8-course tasting menu, with the option for wine pairings. During the meal, guests can interact with chefs and observe culinary students in action, deepening their appreciation for African flavors.

Malonga's new campus will also offer add-on experiences, such as cooking classes where guests learn both traditional African recipes and modern techniques, and a spice masterclass where they can create personalized spice blends. "We want our guests to take a piece of Africa with them," he says.

A Vision Beyond the Table

The new Meza Malonga Campus will also serve as the home for Malonga's Culinary Innovation Village, a non-profit program dedicated to training Africa's next generation of chefs. Open to all, the program offers hands-on culinary training at no cost, providing a launchpad for aspiring chefs across the continent. This educational endeavor aligns with Malonga's "Vision 2050," advocating for free culinary education for all Africans.

As Malonga moves forward, his goal remains clear: to shine a global spotlight on African cuisine and establish it as a celebrated, respected culinary tradition. With the opening of the new campus, he is one step closer to making African gastronomy a powerful force on the world stage.

Reservation and Details

The Meza Malonga Campus, accessible from Kigali, Musanze City, and Volcanoes National Park, will be open from Thursday to Sunday. The experience starts with a boat ride at 11 am and concludes around 6 pm. Groups of more than eight can reserve special arrangements on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. For those unable to visit Musanze, the Meza Malonga Lab in Kigali will remain available for private group dinners.

Contact Information

For inquiries or to book, email ***contact@dieuveilmalonga.com*** or WhatsApp ***+250785146072.***

Freetown

Discover Sierra Leone's historic capital—where vibrant landscapes, iconic architecture, and Afrocentric style come together in a symphony of culture and elegance.

Photographed Savior Sylvester with
Drone operation by Jamieu Bakarr

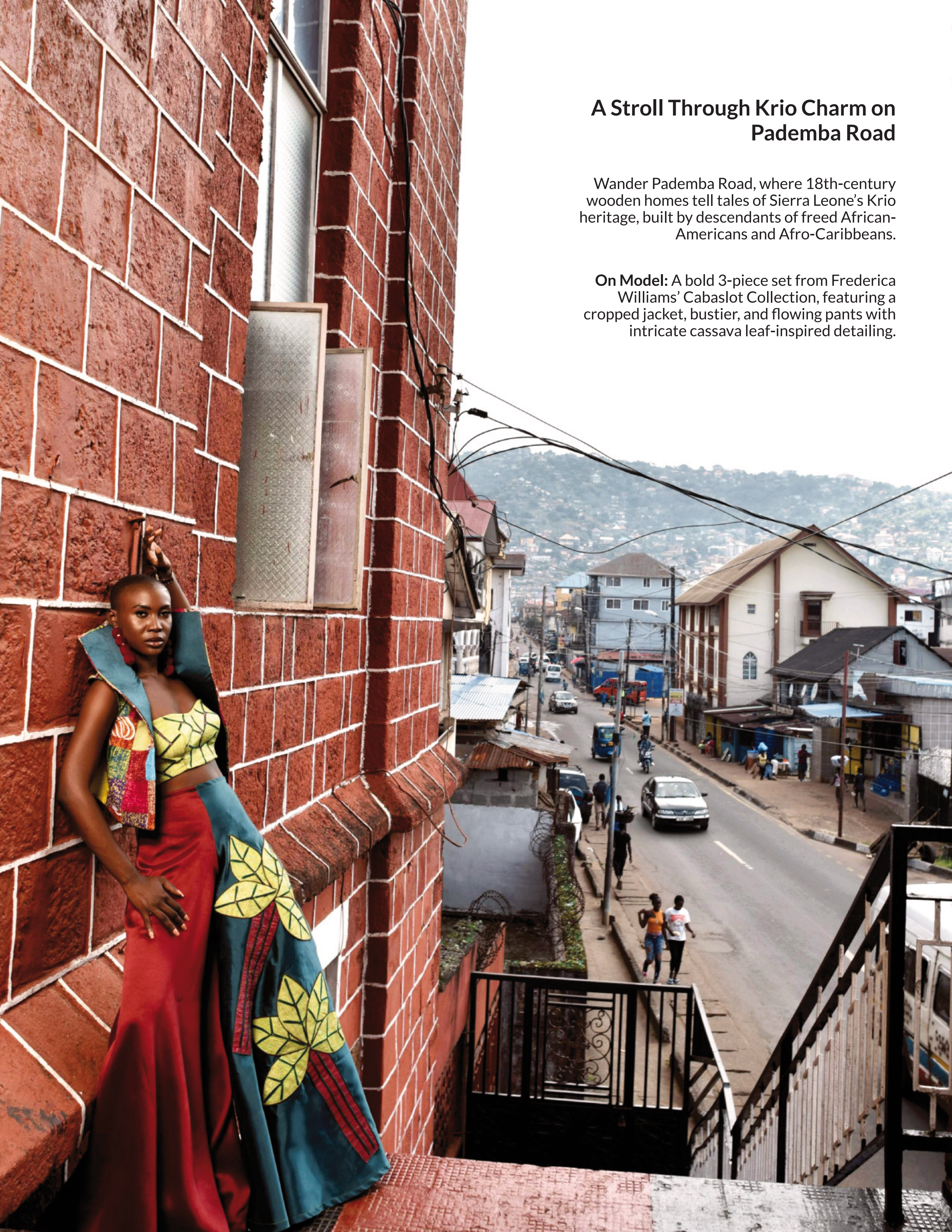
Creative Direction by Chukwudi Franklin Obiorah and Leann Knowlden

A Coastal Greeting at Aberdeen Lighthouse

Step into history at **Aberdeen's storied** raised beach, where the iconic lighthouse stands tall against the whispers of the Atlantic. This westernmost tip of Sierra Leone's mainland bridges continents and tells tales of seafaring adventures.

- **On Lucy Koroma:** Silk tie-dye flowy pants and a breezy mini bubu by Jenneh Amara-Bangali's Swank Couture. Accessories: Shephor's (Hannah Fullah collection) chic bag.

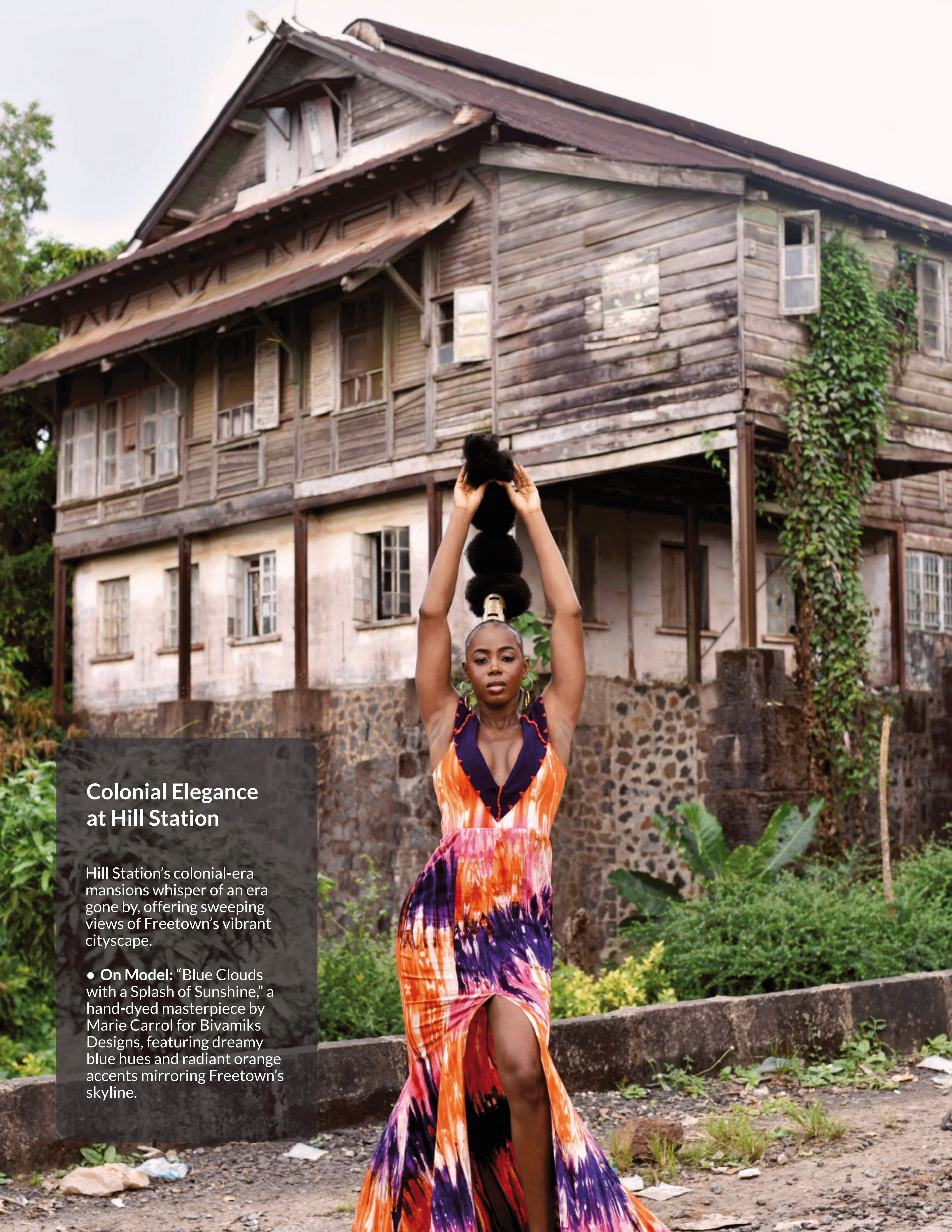
- **On Lucinda Esther Bendu:** A striking apple-green Traditional Country Cloth crop top with gold accents, paired with satin flowy pants by Jenneh Amara-Bangali's Swank Couture. Accessories: Bag by Shephor (Hannah Fullah collection).



A Stroll Through Krio Charm on Pademba Road

Wander Pademba Road, where 18th-century wooden homes tell tales of Sierra Leone's Krio heritage, built by descendants of freed African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans.

On Model: A bold 3-piece set from Frederica Williams' Cabaslot Collection, featuring a cropped jacket, bustier, and flowing pants with intricate cassava leaf-inspired detailing.



Colonial Elegance at Hill Station

Hill Station's colonial-era mansions whisper of an era gone by, offering sweeping views of Freetown's vibrant cityscape.

- **On Model:** "Blue Clouds with a Splash of Sunshine," a hand-dyed masterpiece by Marie Carrol for Bivamiks Designs, featuring dreamy blue hues and radiant orange accents mirroring Freetown's skyline.

Leaning into Freetown's Majesty at G Gate

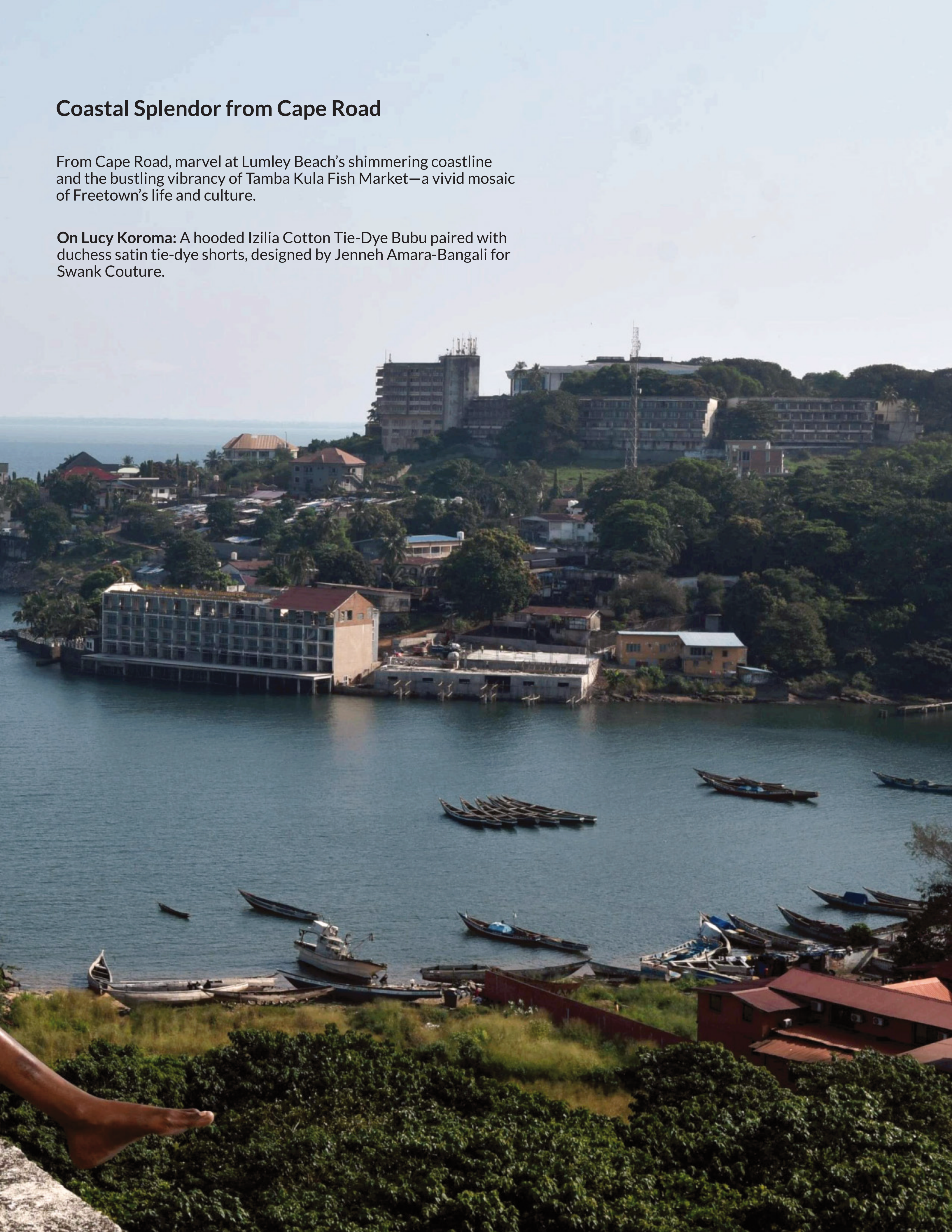
Stand amidst the lush landscapes of Lion Mountain, where Freetown's breathtaking beauty unfolds in valleys, peaks, and timeless views.

On Model: A full-skirt Cabaslot dress by Frederica Williams for her JH Heritage Collection, with hand-cut details that embody the mountainous landscape of Freetown's natural splendor.

Coastal Splendor from Cape Road

From Cape Road, marvel at Lumley Beach's shimmering coastline and the bustling vibrancy of Tamba Kula Fish Market—a vivid mosaic of Freetown's life and culture.

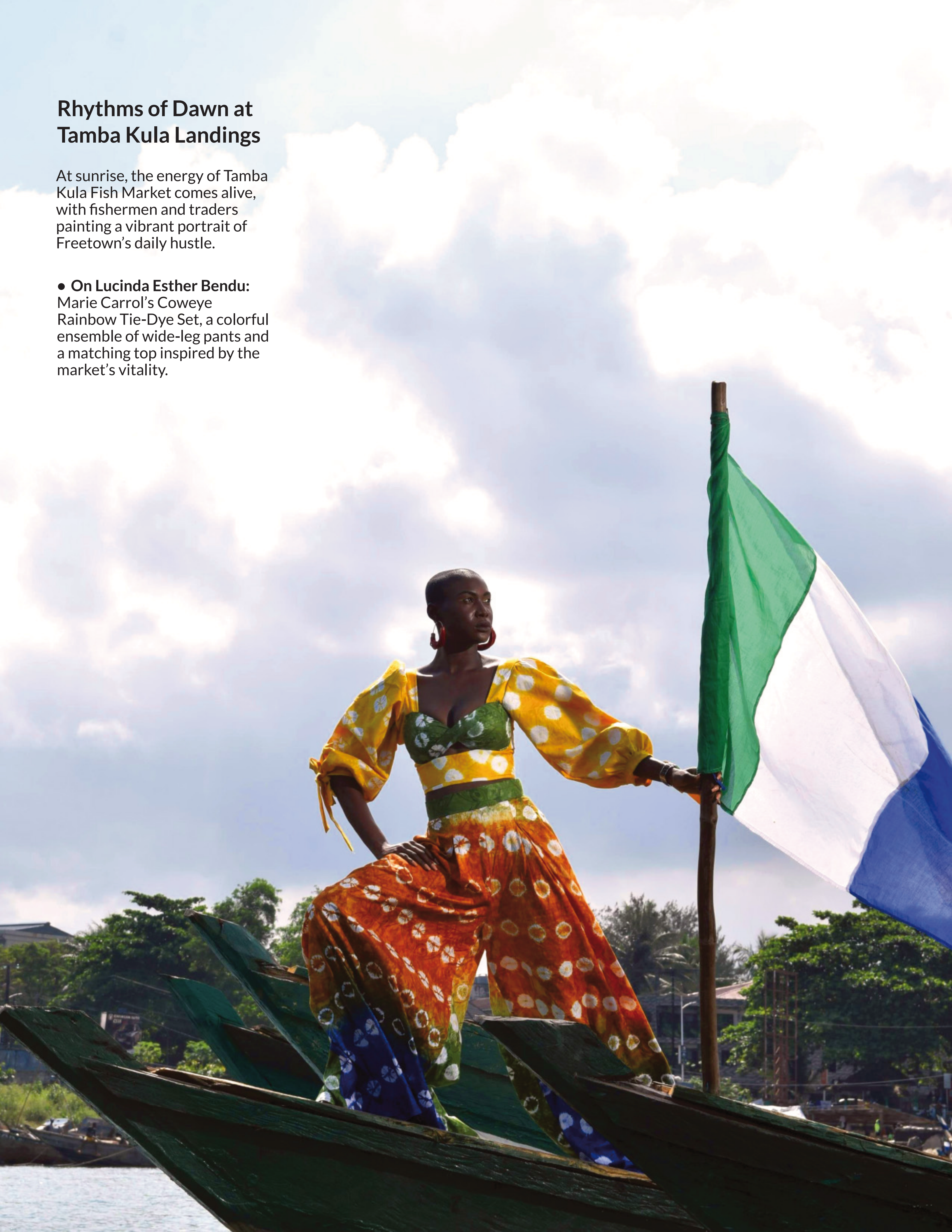
On Lucy Koroma: A hooded Izilia Cotton Tie-Dye Bubu paired with duchess satin tie-dye shorts, designed by Jenneh Amara-Bangali for Swank Couture.



Rhythms of Dawn at Tamba Kula Landings

At sunrise, the energy of Tamba Kula Fish Market comes alive, with fishermen and traders painting a vibrant portrait of Freetown's daily hustle.

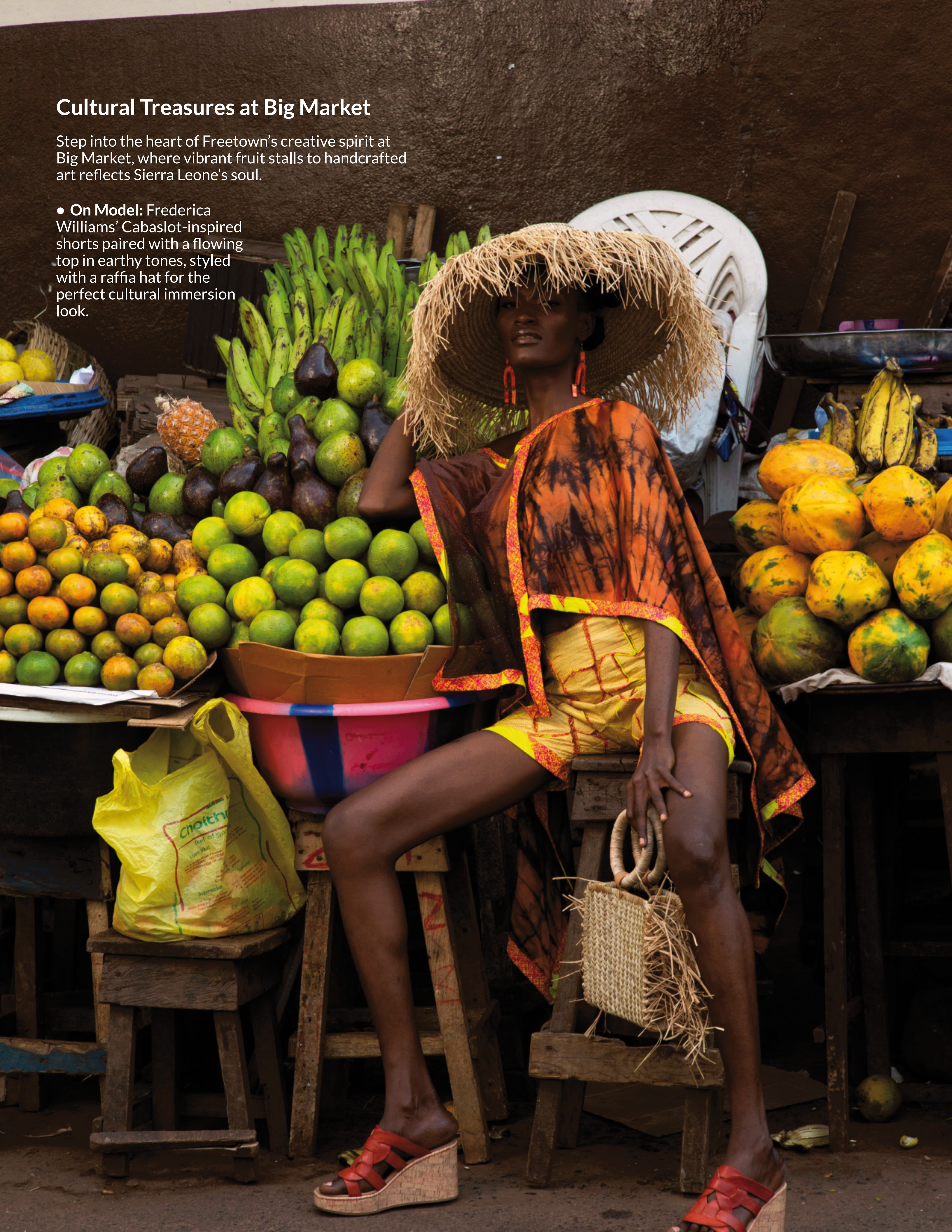
- **On Lucinda Esther Bendu:** Marie Carrol's Coweye Rainbow Tie-Dye Set, a colorful ensemble of wide-leg pants and a matching top inspired by the market's vitality.



Cultural Treasures at Big Market

Step into the heart of Freetown's creative spirit at Big Market, where vibrant fruit stalls to handcrafted art reflects Sierra Leone's soul.

- **On Model:** Frederica Williams' Cabaslot-inspired shorts paired with a flowing top in earthy tones, styled with a raffia hat for the perfect cultural immersion look.



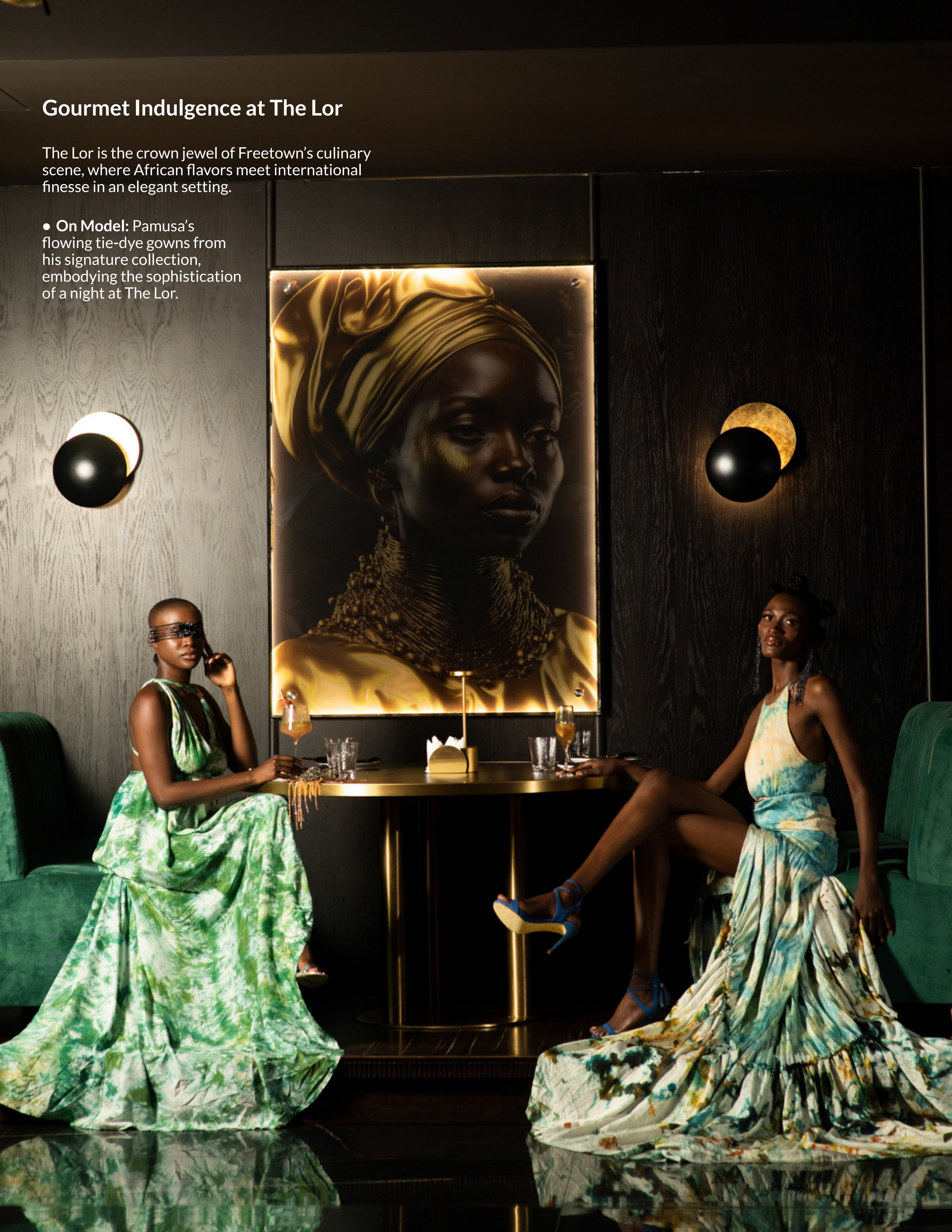
Sun-Kissed Leisure at Lumley Beach

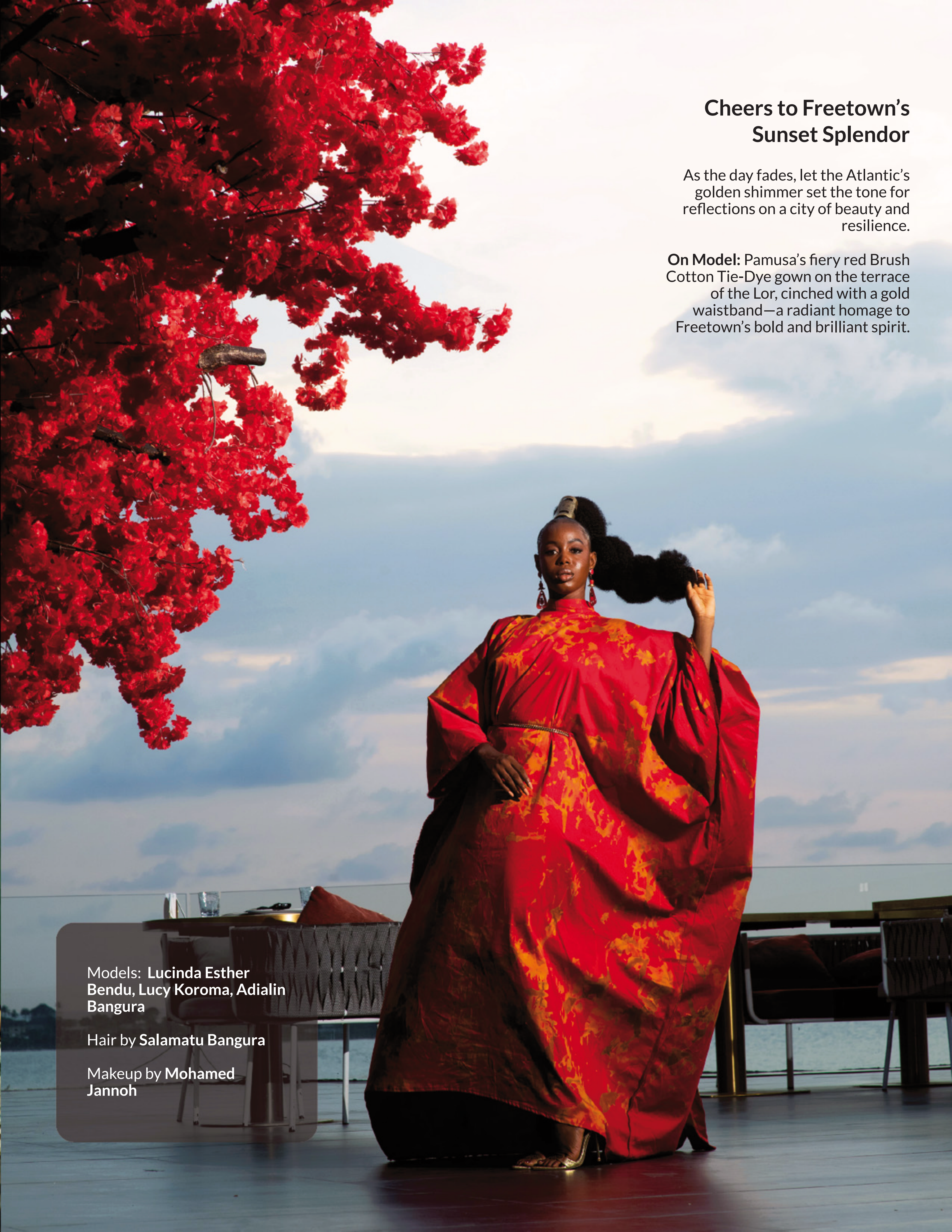
Lumley Beach is the epitome of coastal charm, alive with beachfront dining, bike rides, and the laid-back rhythms of Freetown’s seaside life.

Gourmet Indulgence at The Lor

The Lor is the crown jewel of Freetown's culinary scene, where African flavors meet international finesse in an elegant setting.

- **On Model:** Pamusa's flowing tie-dye gowns from his signature collection, embodying the sophistication of a night at The Lor.





Cheers to Freetown's Sunset Splendor

As the day fades, let the Atlantic's golden shimmer set the tone for reflections on a city of beauty and resilience.

On Model: Pamusa's fiery red Brush Cotton Tie-Dye gown on the terrace of the Lor, cinched with a gold waistband—a radiant homage to Freetown's bold and brilliant spirit.

Models: **Lucinda Esther Bendu, Lucy Koroma, Adialin Bangura**

Hair by **Salamatu Bangura**

Makeup by **Mohamed Jannoh**

From the Cabaslot to Revolutionary Tie Dyes

4 Designers Taking Sierra Leone Homegrown *Fashion* Mainstream

The Story Behind Bivamiks Designs and Marie Carrol

Elegant Simplicity

Marie Carrol, owner and creative director of Bivamiks Designs, is a passionate designer whose love for fabric and fashion has been a lifelong affair. Her brand, based in Freetown, Sierra Leone, reflects her deep connection to the artistry of local textiles and her commitment to showcasing Sierra Leonean creativity to the world. "Bivamiks Designs has been a journey," Carrol shares. "I always loved fashion, but life initially took me down a different path. I started as an accountant because my family insisted on it. But about six years ago, I made the leap to follow my passion full-time, naming the brand after my nieces—Bianca, Valerie, and Nikila—who are a big part of my inspiration.”

Carrol’s connection to fashion runs even deeper, rooted in her mother’s tie-dye and tailoring project that helped teach young girls valuable skills. “My mom was incredible. She taught me how to look for fabrics and how to find the fabrics that will work for a certain occasion. She taught me the patterns and how to mix them. She’s very interesting, very fashionable and I find myself doing the same thing.” That foundation has shaped everything at Bivamiks.

At the heart of Carrol’s work is her devotion to fabrics, especially local materials like country cloth and gara (a traditional tie-dye technique). “For me, it’s all about the fabric,” she explains. “The fabric speaks first—I just listen and design around it. Whether it’s a bold tie-dye or a finely woven country cloth, the goal is to let the material shine and match it with the person’s attitude and occasion. I tell people, if I can take the fabric and wrap it around your body, it’s perfect for me. The fabric is what I’m designing.”

Her designs, from elegant dresses to structured headwraps, embody Sierra Leone’s vibrant culture. “We use locally made products for most of our pieces. For instance, for the Africa Travel and Life Magazine shoot, I worked with gara fabrics dyed to reflect the colors of a Sierra Leone sunset—yellows, blues, greens, and oranges. The fabrics and the stories they tell are what make our designs special,” Carrol says.

Carrol believes deeply in collaboration, legacy, and the growth of Sierra Leone’s creative industry. “We have so much talent here. It’s not just about what I create but about learning from and sharing with others. Legacy is critical—we need to pass on our skills and stories to keep this industry alive and thriving.”

A Conversation with Marie Carrol of Bivamiks Designs

Interviewer: Chrislyn Laurie

Chrislyn Laurie: Marie, your designs often center on local fabrics like gara and country cloth. What inspires you most about working with these materials?

Marie Carrol: “The beauty of our local fabrics is in their depth and character. Gara and country cloth are unique—they carry the stories of our artisans and culture. When I design with them, it feels like I’m continuing a conversation that started generations ago. It’s truly special to create something that feels both modern and deeply rooted in tradition.”

Chrislyn Laurie: Your brand name, Bivamiks, has a personal touch. How does your family influence your work?

Marie Carrol: “My family is at the core of everything I do. My mom was my first fashion teacher—she showed me how to appreciate fabrics and create beauty from them. And naming the brand after my nieces keeps me grounded. They remind me why I started—to build something meaningful that reflects love, legacy, and creativity.”

Chrislyn Laurie: What’s your vision for Sierra Leone’s fashion industry?

Marie Carrol: “My vision is for Sierra Leonean fashion to take its rightful place on the global stage. We have incredible artisans and designers who are doing amazing work. I want us to collaborate more, share our techniques, and showcase the beauty of our craft. It’s about creating a legacy that celebrates who we are and inspires the next generation of creatives.”

The Creative Force Behind Pamusa

Celebrating Musa Senesi

Musa Senesi is a name synonymous with bold creativity and cultural pride. As the creative director and owner of Pa Musa, this Freetown-based designer has been making waves in the fashion world with his innovative use of tie-dye, natural fabrics, and a design process that's as intuitive as it is artistic. From humble beginnings in his mother's dye workshop to international runways, Musa's journey is a testament to the power of passion and self-belief.

"I started fashion for fun," Musa recalls. "Then, everything changed when I got my first breakthrough—a feature in Vogue Italia. That moment made me realize that my work could go beyond Sierra Leone."

Since then, Musa has showcased his collections at prestigious events like London Fashion Week and Cairo Fashion Week, and he's gearing up for Nigerian Fashion Week and other international shows. "Every stage of my career is a stepping stone," he says. "I want to make designs that speak to every region, every race, while staying true to my Sierra Leonean roots."

Musa's affinity for tie-dye runs deep, tracing back to his childhood. "I've been doing tie-dye since I was five. My mother was a tie-dye artist, and she taught me everything I know," Musa shares. "But she also emphasized the importance of making it unique. Her lessons laid the foundation, but now I've taken it in a completely new direction."

For Musa, tie-dye is more than a craft—it's a medium for storytelling. "It represents Sierra Leone," he explains. "But my goal is to make our tie-dye appreciated globally. Every design is a challenge to push beyond traditional boundaries."

Unlike many designers, Musa doesn't rely on sketches to bring his ideas to life. Instead, he lets the fabric guide him. "For me, it starts with the fabric," he explains. "I work with natural materials like silk and cotton. Once I feel the texture, I dye the fabric. Watching it dry, seeing how the colors flow—that's where the inspiration for the garment comes from. My most powerful tool is the scissors; they never fail me. If I make a mistake, it becomes a new style."

For Musa, Sierra Leone isn't just a backdrop; it's a muse. His collections often incorporate local craftsmanship, vibrant colors inspired by the landscape, and silhouettes that pay homage to cultural traditions. "I want the world to see what Sierra Leone has to offer. We have so much talent here—it's time to share it with the world," he says.

With Pa Musa, Musa Senesi is redefining Sierra Leonean fashion for a global stage, blending tradition with modernity to create designs that are, as he puts it, "unique, out of this world, and full of confidence."

A Conversation with Musa Senesi

Interviewer: Chrislyn Laurie

Chrislyn Laurie: Musa, what inspires your designs?

Musa Senesi: Inspiration is everywhere! It could be a color, a scene in nature, or even just my own thoughts. I say I inspire myself because the creativity comes from within.

Chrislyn Laurie: Your designs have such a unique voice. How do you ensure they stand out?

Musa Senesi: I always aim to challenge myself. I want every piece to feel different. Tie-dye is my signature, but I combine it with innovative techniques and global influences. The key is to create something that feels both rooted and out of this world.

Chrislyn Laurie: If someone wears Pa Musa, what do you want them to feel?

Musa Senesi: Confidence. My designs are bold enough to speak for themselves, so when you wear them, you can keep everything else simple. Just let the clothes do the talking.

Federica Williams and the Timeless Cabaslot

Heritage in Every Stitch

Federica Williams, creative director of JF Heritage, is more than just a designer—she's a cultural storyteller. For over two decades, her Sierra Leone-based fashion house has reimagined the Cabaslot, the traditional attire of the Krio people, blending history with contemporary elegance.

"The Cabaslot is a legacy," Williams says. "It originated in 1787 when freed slaves brought their adaptations of Victorian dresses to Freetown. These garments were initially imitations of their enslavers' attire but evolved into something uniquely Krio, with full bodices, embroidered chest panels, and voluminous skirts.

Williams recalls how the design adapted to the challenges and resources of its time. "Initially, the embroidery featured insertion lace, but when that became scarce, the women created intricate, hand-cut designs using cotton fabrics," she explains. "Over time, the voluminous skirts and long sleeves were shortened to suit Freetown's tropical climate. Yet, the heart of the design—the artistry and craftsmanship—remained."

At JF Heritage, Williams has embraced the evolution of the Cabaslot while ensuring its roots remain visible.

"When I started JF Heritage 20 years ago, I wanted to make the Cabaslot appealing to younger generations," she says. "I experimented with modern silhouettes, bold colors, and conceptual designs. Now, it's not just Krio attire—it's become a national symbol embraced by Sierra Leoneans of all ages and backgrounds."

One of her most celebrated designs features a hand-cut interpretation of Freetown's landscape, incorporating the city's mountains and shores. "The dress tells the story of Freetown—a meeting of seas and mountains, a tapestry of cultures, and a symbol of unity," Williams shares. "It's handmade with love, every stitch celebrating our heritage."

A Conversation with Federica Williams

Interviewer: Chrislyn Laurie

Chrislyn Laurie: Federica, the Cabaslot is steeped in history. What does it mean to you personally as a designer?

Federica Williams: "To me, the Cabaslot is more than fashion—it's a connection to our ancestors. It's a testament to their resilience and creativity in transforming what they had into something beautiful and meaningful. As a designer, it's an honor to preserve that legacy while giving it a fresh voice for modern audiences."

Chrislyn Laurie: Your designs are celebrated for their conceptual storytelling. Can you share the inspiration behind your Freetown landscape piece?

Federica Williams: "The Freetown landscape dress is one of my favorites because it captures the essence of our city. Freetown is bordered by seas and mountains, and these natural elements symbolize the diversity of people and cultures who call it home. The multicolored mountains in the design represent our ethnic groups, and the hand-cut details reflect our craftsmanship. It's a love letter to Freetown."

Chrislyn Laurie: How do you see JF Heritage shaping the future of Sierra Leonean fashion?

Federica Williams: "I see JF Heritage as a bridge between our past and future. My goal is to inspire young designers to embrace their heritage while innovating. Fashion is a powerful medium to tell stories, and Sierra Leone has so many to share. By blending tradition with modernity, we're creating a vibrant, globally recognized Sierra Leonean style."

GIRLS BEHIND THE LENS

Forever Chic

Jenneh Amarah Bangali and the Essence of Swank Couture

In the heart of Freetown, Sierra Leone, at 39 Adelaide Street, lies the creative world of Swank Couture, a fashion house led by the visionary designer Jenneh Amara Bengali. Known for her “forever pieces”—timeless garments that transcend the fleeting nature of trends—Jenneh embodies a philosophy of elegance, sustainability, and cultural connection.

Jenneh’s journey began in Abidjan,

> “ I always try to involve women in what I do. It’s about uplifting our community and showcasing Sierra Leone’s rich culture.

Côte d’Ivoire, where she turned a hobby into a burgeoning passion. “I started designing for my neighborhood and friends while I was in school,” she recalls. “I’d pick the fabric, imagine the styles, and work with local tailors to bring my ideas to life.” Though she never formally studied fashion, her travels and textiles gave her an unconventional education. Exploring countries with her husband, she collaborated with artisans from diverse cultures, blending their techniques with her innate creativity.

The hallmark of Swank Couture is its commitment to timelessness. “My pieces are designed to last,” Jenneh explains. “They’re not about fast fashion or fleeting trends. Even 20 years from now, you should be able to pull out a Swank Couture piece and feel it’s as fresh and relevant as the day you bought it.” This ethos extends to her design process, where plain fabrics are transformed through techniques like tie-dye, embroidery, and subtle embellishments. “It’s about adding just enough—never over the top—but creating something you’d love to wear for years.”

For Jenneh, Sierra Leone is an ever-present source of inspiration. “Living here has deeply influenced my work,” she says. She partners with local female artisans who create traditional tie-dye and woven fabrics, incorporating their craft into her designs. “I always try to involve women in what I do. It’s not just about creating beautiful clothes; it’s about uplifting our community and showcasing Sierra Leone’s rich culture.”

This connection to her homeland was on full display in her designs for Africa Travel and Life Magazine’s recent feature. Tasked with capturing the essence of Sierra Leone’s natural beauty, Jenneh envisioned a collection that felt as fluid and alive as the landscapes themselves. “I worked with colors that reflected the earth—sea blues for the ocean, greens for the mountains and greenery,” she shares.

While Swank Couture has become a beloved name in Sierra Leone, Jenneh remains focused on collaboration and growth. “As a Sierra Leonean designer, I believe in opening doors for others and growing through partnerships,” she says. “There’s so much room for us to thrive together.”
Swank Couture’s timeless designs, rooted in culture and sustainability, serve as a testament to Jenneh’s vision of fashion as both an art form and a force for good.

A Conversation with Jenneh Amara Bengali

Chrislyn Laurie Laurore: “I love this top that you’re wearing. Is it one of your designs?”

Jenneh: “Yes, it is. It’s actually a shirt dress.”

Chrislyn Laurie Laurore: “What inspired the designs you created for Africa Travel and Life Magazine?”

Jenneh: “I wanted to bring something Sierra Leonean—comfortable, airy, and perfect for our warm weather. I thought about the sea, the mountains, and the greenery. These natural elements inspired me to work with tie-dyed sea blue fabrics and earthy greens. I wanted the clothes to feel as beautiful and free as Sierra Leone’s landscapes.”

Chrislyn Laurie Laurore: “What do you want women to feel when wearing Swank Couture?”

Jenneh: “Comfort, first and foremost. But also an air of confidence and sexiness. My designs are about free-spirited elegance—being happy, carefree, and comfortable in your own skin.”

Divers With a Purpose (DWP) team at work at the L'Aurore 'slave' shipwreck site in Mozambique.

Photo courtesy of **DWP**

Black divers and archaeologists are uncovering and memorializing the transatlantic slave trade shipwrecked “Vessels of Enslavement”

Kamau on the L’Aurore “slave” shipwreck site in Mozambique.

Brought to Tears Underwater

Diving the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

By **Chrislyn Laurie Laurore**

Photographs provided by **Divers With A Purpose**

In January 1790, as enslaved people were boarding the ship in the harbor of Ilha de Mozambique, the 356 already on board attempted to mutiny, during which four of them drowned. Because of the insurrection, the crew locked the enslaved men below deck. Women and children were kept in the main cabin. On February 17, 1790, when about to take off, the *L’Aurore* was hit by a typhoon while at anchor with a cargo of 600 enslaved Africans. The crew refused to unlock the lower deck and abandoned the ship and the Africans to their fate. By morning, 331 of them had perished. The ship was partially salvaged immediately after sinking but then lay undisturbed for 230 years.

On a tranquil evening at Legacy Beach in Monrovia, Liberia, I sat down with Kamau Sadiki—a man whose life work delves deep beneath the ocean’s surface, uncovering the silent yet profound stories of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. A retired engineer, Kamau’s journey has taken him from the academic halls of Howard University in Washington, D.C., to the depths of the Atlantic, where he now serves as a lead instructor in the underwater archaeology program for Diving With a Purpose (DWP).

According to the captain's account of the shipwreck, the *L'Aurore*, a French vessel, left present-day Mauritius for Mozambique in November 1789 to pick up enslaved people en route to its final destination, the French Caribbean.

As Kamau recounted his involvement with DWP, it was clear this was more than a professional endeavor; it was a calling. Founded in the early 2000s by Ken Stewart, a visionary community organizer, and Brenda Lazendorf, an archaeologist at Biscayne National Park, DWP emerged from a serendipitous collaboration. Their mission? To document shipwrecks in Biscayne's waters—a task that Brenda lacked resources to undertake. Ken, inspired by the untapped potential of skilled Black scuba divers, mobilized a small cohort to train in underwater archaeology, sparking a movement that now spans decades and has trained over 500 divers worldwide.

Their work has evolved to uncover and memorialize shipwrecks from the transatlantic slave trade—vessels Kamau poignantly refers to as "vessels of enslavement." Of the 12,000 ships involved in the slave trade, an estimated 40,000 voyages were made across the Atlantic, yet fewer than 15 of these wrecks have been scientifically documented. Kamau has personally worked on six of these haunting sites, bringing to light the stories of those who endured unimaginable suffering aboard them.

The process is both painstaking and deeply respectful. Divers meticulously map and document the wrecks, creating composite images of the sites while treating them as sacred spaces. For Kamau, the experience transcends the scientific. “The ocean has memory,” he reflects, describing how the ancestors lost on these voyages communicate through the depths. “They’re not going to speak to us in English, Portuguese, or Spanish. They speak to us through our hearts, through our spirits.”
Kamau shared his belief that every dive is a spiritual journey—a chance to listen, connect, and honor the lives lost. With over 1,600 dives under his belt, nearly a third of which have been on these “vessels of enslavement,” he approaches each mission with reverence. Before entering the water, divers hold ceremonies to acknowledge the history and humanity of those who perished. “We know these are sacred sites. There’s been a loss of life, and we must treat them with the dignity they deserve,” he said, visibly moved.

As Kamau eloquently stated, “The challenge is learning how to listen.” And perhaps, as we learn to hear the whispers of history carried by the waves, we might better understand our present and chart a more conscious path forward. These sites, sacred and haunting, serve as final resting places for countless souls who perished during one of history’s darkest chapters.

A Chilling Experience

One of Kamau’s most poignant experiences occurred in 2013 off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa, on the wreck of the *São José Paquete*. A Portuguese vessel, the ship sank in 1794, carrying 212 enslaved Africans, all of whom perished in the icy waters. During an initial survey dive, Kamau encountered a fragment of the ship’s material lodged in the underwater rock. As he reached out to touch it, he was overcome by a flood of emotion—an inexplicable, visceral response to the collective pain and horror of those who had perished.

“I heard their screams in my body and in my head,” he recalls. “I was brought to tears underwater.”

This encounter cemented his commitment to amplifying the voices of the ancestors lost to the sea. Kamau’s work, along with his colleagues, goes beyond archaeology; it is a reclamation of history and a call to honor the dignity of lives erased by centuries of oppression. Shipwrecks, often forgotten or romanticized, become sites of reverence and reflection under the stewardship of DWP. These dives remind us of the enormity of the transatlantic slave trade.

From the Guerrero to the Clotilda

The *Guerrero* and the *Clotilda*, two infamous vessels tied to the transatlantic slave trade, represent not only submerged fragments of history but also the enduring resilience of the African diaspora. Through the work of the DWP initiative, these stories are being brought to the surface, creating a bridge between the past and the present.

New Georgia resident **Horatio Gould**, a Liberian and descendant of the Guerrero shipwreck survivors with DWP’s **Kamau Sadiki** in Monrovia, Liberia.

Photographed by **Roderic Putnam**

Off the coast of Key Largo, Florida, lies the *Guerrero*, a pirate slave ship wrecked on Christmas Day, 1827. This vessel, carrying over 500 enslaved Africans, met its fate after a desperate chase by the British African Squadron’s HMS *Nimble*. Tragically, while 41 lives were lost in the wreck, many others fell victim to subsequent enslavement schemes.
The journey of the remaining captives is equally heart-wrenching. Following years of turmoil in Key West, Florida, and subsequent enslavement in St. Augustine, a fraction of the survivors—92 individuals—found their way to Liberia, established by American Colonization Society (ACS)

in 1822 on the West Coast of Africa as a colony for freed and recaptured African-American slaves from the United States. These 92 individuals settled and established a settlement called New Georgia in Liberia. Their descendants provide living testimony to this incredible story. "Meeting these descendants has been the most profound part of our work," Kamau shares. "The power of these connections, the emotion of tracing their ancestors' journey, is beyond words."

DWP's work is not just about unearthing shipwrecks but also empowering communities to take ownership of their stories. In Liberia's New Georgia, DWP wants to inspire the next generation by teaching local youth to swim, dive, and ultimately engage in maritime archaeology. The long-term vision? To have these young Liberians dive on the *Guerrero's* wreck site in Florida, completing a full-circle journey to their ancestral origins.

The *Clotilda*, the last known slave ship to transport Africans to the United States, holds a unique place in history. Unlike the *Guerrero*, the *Clotilda's* wreck has remained remarkably intact, offering unparalleled insight into the horrors of the Middle Passage. "Of the 12,000 slave ships that crossed the Atlantic, this is the only one we can clearly see as a ship," Kamau emphasizes. The significance of preserving the *Clotilda* extends beyond its physical structure. It represents a tangible connection to the descendants of the enslaved people who endured its journey. In Africatown, Alabama, the community of *Clotilda* descendants continues to honor their ancestors' legacy, creating a powerful heritage trail that intertwines their stories with the shipwreck's historical footprint.

For travelers, these stories invite a deeper exploration of Africa and its diaspora. From beneath the ocean at Camp Bay to the vibrant streets of New Georgia, Liberia, every corner of the continent holds layers of history waiting to be discovered.

Kamau Sadiki on Travel, Diving, and Mozambique's Hidden Gems

Chrislyn: Kamau, this being a travel and lifestyle magazine, could you tell us about your favorite places to visit or dive?

Kamau: That's a tough one because all the places I've dived hold a special place in my heart. But if I had to choose, Ilha de Mozambique stands out. It's an idyllic island off the coast of Mozambique with a population of about 14,000 people. It's a former Portuguese colonial hub with stunning architecture and a unique cultural charm. I've been visiting since 2013—probably 15 or more times now—and it never ceases to amaze me.

Chrislyn: What makes the journey to Ilha de Mozambique so memorable?

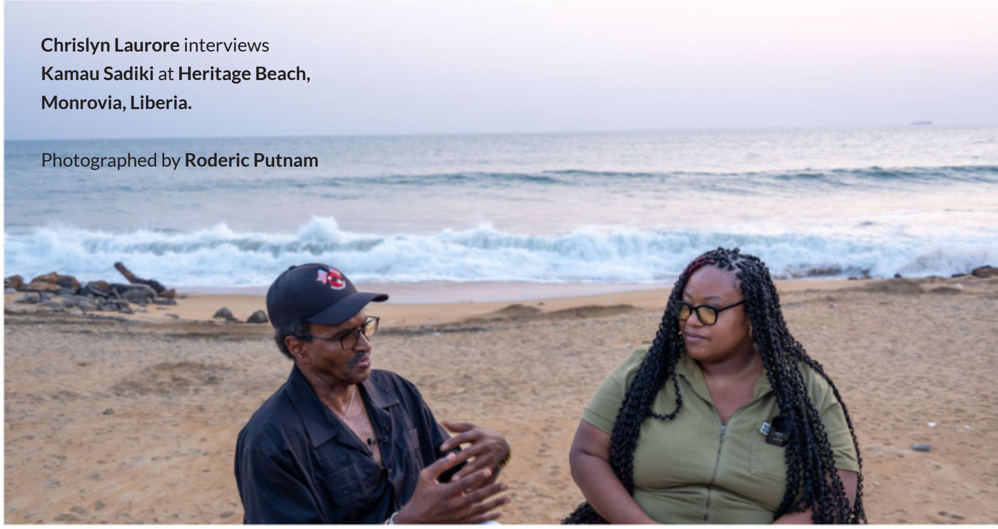
Kamau: Getting there is part of the adventure. First, there's a 20-hour flight to Johannesburg, followed by an overnight stay. Then, you take a three-hour flight to Nampula and embark on a four-hour drive to the coast. The drive is fascinating—you pass through little towns and villages that give you a glimpse of local life. When you finally arrive, the island greets you with its beauty and vibrant culture.

Chrislyn: What role does Diving with a Purpose (DWP) play on the island?

Kamau: We've partnered with the local community to develop eco-tourism and cultural heritage initiatives. We train Mozambicans in diving and underwater archaeology so they can reclaim their stories and share their history. One young woman we trained is now guiding eco-tours and teaching about the island's mangroves and environmental stewardship.

Chrislyn: That's inspiring! What's the food like on Ilha de Mozambique?

Kamau: The food is amazing. I'm vegan, so I always enjoy their greens, especially with rice. They make this delicious spinach-like dish, and I'm a fan of their peri peri hot sauce. The locals know to prepare something special when they see me coming!



Chrislyn Laurore interviews **Kamau Sadiki** at **Heritage Beach, Monrovia, Liberia.**

Photographed by **Roderic Putnam**

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>
> -Kamai Sadiki-

Ilha de Mozambique is a step into history, and the Governor's Palace Museum, constructed in 1510, is one of its crown jewels. The palace's chapel interior remains an untouched room, frozen in time, within this former Portuguese hub. Kamau Sadiki, who explores the Transatlantic Slave Trade through diving, calls Mozambique his favorite destination

Algiers Skyline Overlooking the Mediterranean

Go Algiers

Algiers, often called *El Bahja* (The Joyful), is a city that captivates with its Mediterranean charm and rich history. Perched along the dazzling coast, Algeria's capital city is a harmonious blend of whitewashed buildings, vibrant culture, and centuries-old traditions. Whether you're a history buff, foodie, or adventure seeker, this fascinating city offers something for everyone.

A Blend of Old and New

Algiers offers a mesmerizing mix of the old and the new. At its heart lies the iconic Casbah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, characterized by steep, winding streets, Ottoman-era palaces, and the remains of a historic citadel. This labyrinthine district offers a glimpse into Algiers' storied past, with its lively bazaars, intricate architecture, and hidden terraces boasting stunning views of the Mediterranean.

Among its architectural treasures, the 17th-century Ketchaoua Mosque stands out with its twin minarets, while the Great Mosque enchants visitors with elegant marble columns and arches. For breathtaking views and spiritual solace, head to the clifftop basilica of Notre-Dame d'Afrique. Crowned with a grand silver dome and adorned with intricate mosaics, this Catholic sanctuary is a testament to the city's diverse cultural heritage.

Whether you're wandering through historic medinas or soaking in the Mediterranean charm, Algiers promises an unforgettable experience.

Best Bets

Martyrs' Memorial (Maqam Echahid)

This towering monument, shaped like three palm leaves, is a powerful symbol of Algeria's fight for independence. Located on a hill overlooking the city, it's a place to reflect on the country's history while enjoying panoramic views of Algiers and beyond.

Jardin d'Essai du Hamma

Escape the urban hustle at this lush botanical garden, a serene retreat in the heart of Algiers. Divided into French and English gardens, it's perfect for a leisurely stroll amidst exotic plants, grand trees, and beautifully landscaped spaces. Don't miss the zoo and picturesque views of the surrounding area.

Martyrs' Memorial (Maqam Echahid)

Bardo National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography

Immerse yourself in Algeria's rich history and cultural heritage at this fascinating museum. Its extensive collection ranges from prehistoric tools and fossils to traditional garments and ethnographic artifacts, offering insights into the region's diverse past and present.

Notre-Dame d'Afrique

Perched high on a cliff, this stunning basilica combines Byzantine and Moorish architectural styles. With its intricate mosaics and breathtaking views of the Bay of Algiers, it's both a spiritual and visual highlight of any visit.

The Casbah of Algiers

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Casbah is the historic heart of Algiers. Wander through its maze-like alleys, discover Ottoman-era palaces, and soak in views of the Mediterranean from hidden terraces. This vibrant quarter is a window into centuries of history and the beating heart of Algerian culture.

Notre-Dame d'Afrique

The Casbah of Algiers

Neighborhoods to Explore

Bab El Oued

A lively and vibrant area, Bab El Oued is renowned for its bustling markets, where locals and visitors alike can shop for fresh produce, spices, and traditional goods. Its charming bakeries serve up mouthwatering pastries, while the neighborhood's proximity to the sea makes it an ideal spot to enjoy the coastal breeze.

Hydra

An elegant and upscale district, Hydra boasts chic cafés, stylish boutiques, and a serene atmosphere. Known for its lush greenery and grand embassies, this neighborhood is a favorite among expats and affluent locals. Whether you're looking for a leisurely coffee break or a stroll through tree-lined streets, Hydra offers a touch of sophistication.

El Madania

El Madania presents a harmonious blend of modernity and tradition. This neighborhood is celebrated for its authentic dining experiences, with local eateries offering a variety of traditional Algerian dishes. Its vibrant community and unique character make it a must-visit for those seeking a true taste of Algiers.

Foodies' Favorites

Makroud Cookies

Grilled vegetable with couscous, a popular dish in Algiers

Nautilus Restaurant at the Sheraton overlooking the Bay

Restaurant El Boustene: Known for its authentic Algerian dishes, including couscous and mechoui (slow-roasted lamb).

Street Food in the Casbah: Try bourek (crispy pastries filled with meat or cheese) and m'semen (layered flatbread).

Taj Mahal: For lovers of Indian cuisine with a North African twist.

Le Tantra: A fine dining restaurant serving a fusion of Mediterranean and Algerian cuisine.

Shopping and Souvenirs

Incense Burner

Traditional Kaftan and Tea Set

The bustling souks and markets of the *Casbah* are a treasure trove of handmade crafts, traditional clothing, and one-of-a-kind souvenirs. Be sure to pick up a beautifully woven Berber carpet or intricately designed pottery, both reflecting the country's rich artisanal traditions. For something truly unique, look for silver jewelry adorned with Tuareg motifs or hand-carved olive wood pieces.

For a more modern shopping experience, head to *Rue Didouche Mourad*, the city's bustling commercial artery. Lined with chic boutiques, bookstores, and cafés, this street offers a perfect blend of local craftsmanship and international brands. Stop by for stylish Algerian fashion or luxury leather goods that showcase a fusion of traditional and contemporary designs.

No trip to Algiers is complete without exploring the artisanal markets in *Hydra* and *El Harrach*. These areas are known for their curated selections of handmade goods, from traditional kaftans to aromatic spices.

Getting Around

Metro:
The Algiers Metro is efficient and connects key areas like Tafourah Grande Poste and Jardin d'Essai.

Taxis:
Widely available, but ensure to negotiate the fare before starting your journey.

Buses:
Affordable but can be crowded during peak hours.

Walking:
Many attractions, especially in the Casbah and central districts, are best explored on foot.

باب الوادي
BAB EL OUED
PLACE DES MARTY
HOTEL ESSAFI

Downtown Algiers

Tips for Travelers

Dress Modestly: Algeria is a conservative country, so opt for modest clothing, especially when visiting religious sites.

Learn Basic French or Arabic: While many locals speak some English, French is widely used.

Best Time to Visit: Spring (March to May) and fall (September to November) offer pleasant weather.

Stay Hydrated: Summers can be hot, so carry water with you.

Day Trips

Tipaza (65 km west of Algiers)

A scenic coastal town steeped in history, Tipaza is home to some of Algeria's most remarkable Roman ruins. Wander through ancient amphitheaters, basilicas, and the ruins of the Roman port while enjoying stunning views of the Mediterranean Sea. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tipaza offers a unique blend of history and natural beauty.

Blida and Chrea National Park (50 km south of Algiers)

Nestled at the base of the Atlas Mountains, Blida is a delightful town surrounded by orchards and lush greenery. From here, venture into Chrea National Park, a haven for nature enthusiasts. Known for its cedar forests, hiking trails, and winter skiing opportunities, the park offers a refreshing escape from the city's hustle and bustle.

Cherchell (90 km west of Algiers)

Located further along the coast, Cherchell is a charming town known for its ancient heritage and vibrant local culture. Explore its archaeological museum, which houses a rich collection of Roman and Phoenician artifacts, or stroll through picturesque streets lined with whitewashed buildings.

Nightlife

As the sun sets over the Mediterranean, Algiers transforms into a lively hub of music, culture, and sophistication. The city's nightlife offers an eclectic mix, from traditional chaabi music performances in atmospheric Casbah venues to trendy rooftop lounges with panoramic views of the Mediterranean. Wander along Rue Didouche Mourad, where cafés buzz with conversation and bars serve up creative cocktails alongside Algerian wines. For a glamorous evening, head to the Sheraton Club des Pins or one of the upscale nightclubs along the waterfront, where DJs spin global hits late into the night.

Roman ruins, 1st and 2nd centuries ce, at Tipasa, Algeria.

Bridging Cultures Through Design

Poornima Thanayamwatta

Hailing from Sri Lanka, Poornima Thanayamwatta has been a driving force behind the visual storytelling of Africa Travel & Life since 2019. As a graphic designer and art director, she has played a pivotal role in shaping the magazine's brand identity, crafting captivating layouts, and bringing African culture and travel to life through bold, modern designs.

Poornima's creative approach celebrates the shared connections between her South Asian heritage and the vibrant cultures of Africa. By blending traditional elements with contemporary design, she highlights the unique interplay of history and innovation.

Designing for a globally focused magazine like Africa Travel & Life has not been without its challenges. Translating Africa's natural beauty and cultural depth into timeless visuals requires a delicate balance of creativity and storytelling. For Poornima, the most rewarding moments come from seeing her work resonate with readers. As she puts it, "Creativity knows no boundaries—it's not about where you're from, but the stories you tell and the connections you make."

Embrace diversity in your projects and be open to exploring new perspectives. Every design is a chance to learn and grow, and the more you immerse yourself in different cultures, the richer your work becomes.

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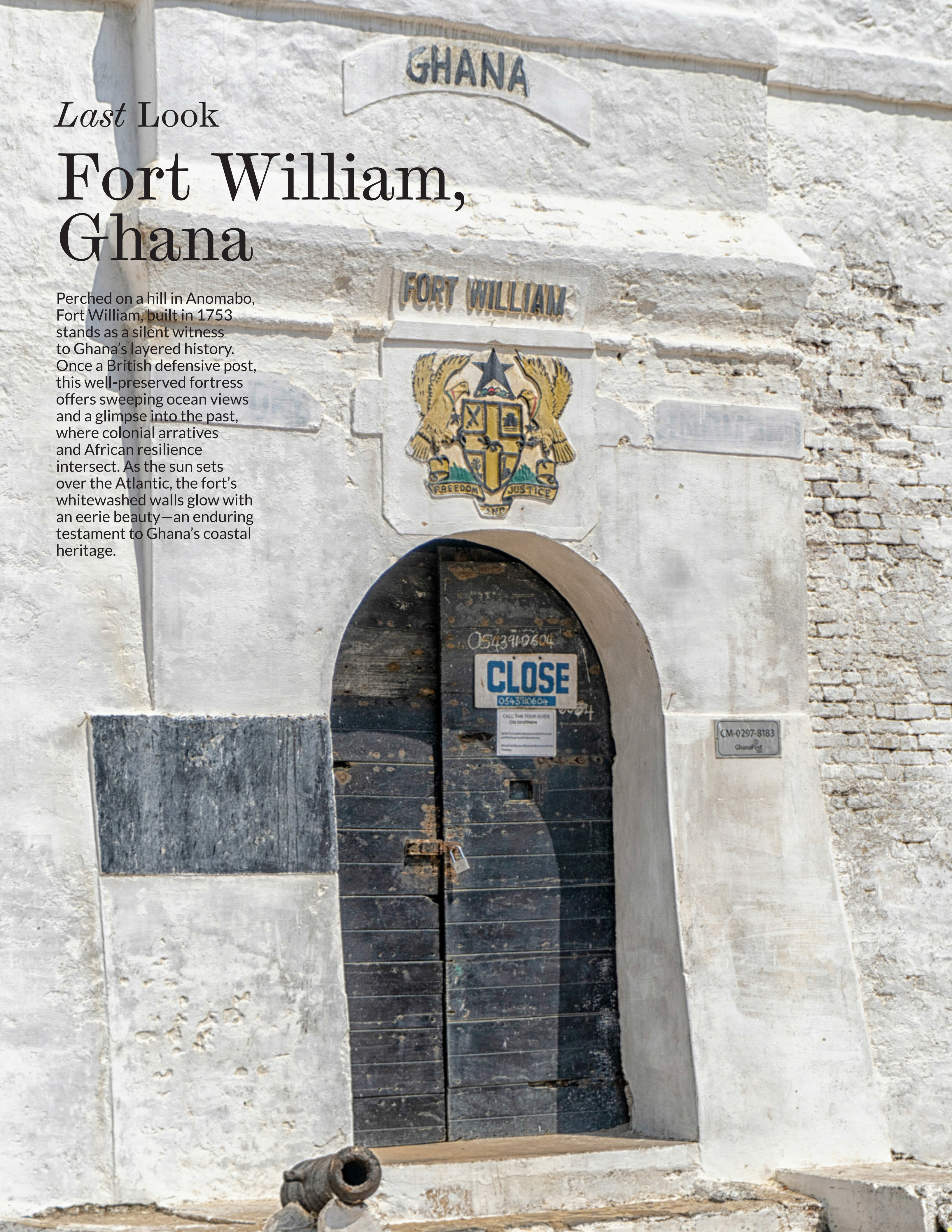
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Last Look

Fort William, Ghana

Perched on a hill in Anomabo, Fort William, built in 1753 stands as a silent witness to Ghana's layered history. Once a British defensive post, this well-preserved fortress offers sweeping ocean views and a glimpse into the past, where colonial arratives and African resilience intersect. As the sun sets over the Atlantic, the fort's whitewashed walls glow with an eerie beauty—an enduring testament to Ghana's coastal heritage.

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